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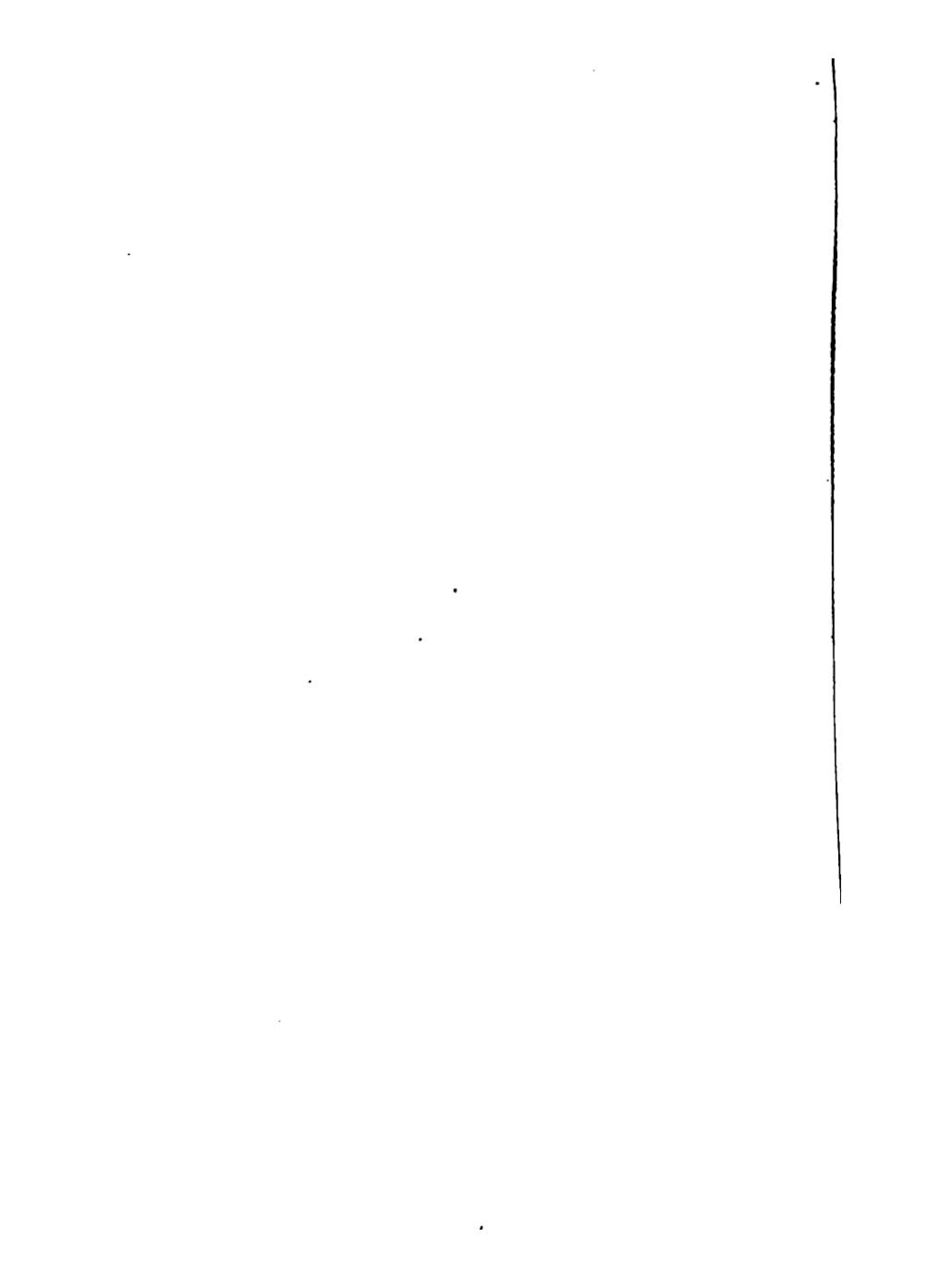
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“EVERY EYE.”

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“EVERY EYE.”

PRACTICAL ADDRESSES FOR ADVENT

AND FOR

THE OLD AND NEW YEAR.

BY THE

REV. GEORGE EVERARD, M.A.

AUTHOR OF “STRONG AND FREE,” ETC.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

IN the following pages my one desire has been to present great and necessary truths in a way that all may be able to understand. They may be useful for Sunday reading, either in the family, or by any who are prevented from attending the house of God.

I have the hope also that they may be useful for young clergymen or laymen who require help in the Church or the Mission-room.

I believe that when spoken they were a word in season to some hearts ; and I pray that now in another form, through the teaching of the Holy Spirit, they may guide some erring souls into the way of peace, and stir up the wills of God's faithful people to cleave closer to Christ, to use more dili-

gently for Him the talents committed to them, and to look more for His glorious appearing.

Especially thankful shall I be if these words prove a message of remembrance to members of my dear old flock at Wolverhampton, who may recognise familiar words once uttered in St. Mark's pulpit.

CHRIST CHURCH VICARAGE, DOVER,

September 18, 1884.

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“EVERY EYE.”

I.

“*EVERY EYE SHALL SEE HIM.*”

(Rev. i. 7.)

THERE is many a “behold” in Holy Scripture, but in this passage we reach the climax of them all.

“Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him” (Ps. xxxiii. 18). “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John iii. 1). “Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world” (John i. 29). “Behold the Man” (John xix. 5). “Behold your King” (John xix. 14): full of deepest meaning and instruction is every one of these views of God’s love and of the Saviour’s grace.

But in grandeur and solemn awe none can for a moment reach the “behold” of the Revelation.

It sounds the keynote of the whole Apocalypse. It gathers within itself the great prophecy of Daniel spoken centuries before, and the bold utterance of Christ as He stood before the Jewish Council. Look at the words of the prophet Daniel, ch. vii. 13, "I saw in the night visions, and behold One like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him, and there was given Him dominion and glory and a kingdom," &c.

Consider the words of Christ when standing before His bloodthirsty judges (Matt. xxvi. 64), "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven."

Then take the words of St. John as given in the Revelation, "Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so. Amen."

In each of these passages two points are very prominent.

It is everywhere distinctly affirmed that He comes in the clouds of heaven. When He ascended to the Father, we are told that a cloud received Him, and hid Him from the sight of His disciples. And as He ascended, so the angels declared that He must come again. So shall it be. In a cloud He departs; in

a cloud He shall return to the earth. And is there not here a plain evidence of His Divine power and authority? Is not this one of the symbols of Jehovah's majesty and glory? We read in Ps. xviii. something of the greatness which appertains to God, and here is one part of that description: "He made darkness His secret place: *His pavilion round about Him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies,*" v. 11. Look again at Ps. civ. 3: "Who maketh the clouds His chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind."

To none but Jehovah's fellow, to none but the co-equal Son of the Most High, would it have been granted thus to come back to our earth, mighty and glorious, seated on the very chariot of Jehovah Himself.

No less impressive is the second point. The Lord Jesus is to be the one object on which every eye is to be fixed. "*Every eye shall see Him.*"

These words have never yet been true of any one who yet has lived. Kings and conquerors have had their days of triumph, and perchance hundreds of thousands have looked upon them as they celebrated the victories they had achieved. We read of a notable scene in olden time, when a monarch gathered together an army of some three millions, and placed his throne where he could gain a sight

of them all, and where a large proportion of them might be able to see him. But far higher, grander, vaster, is the prospect set before us of Christ at His appearing. In that concourse none are absent. All ages, countries, races, and divisions of mankind are present there. None can escape that vision. None are lost or hidden amidst the assembled myriads. How it can be, no thought can possibly fathom. That it shall be, no room is left for doubt. He who once trod the shore of Galilee's lake, He who once was the Friend of a few fishermen, who was meek and lowly of heart, who endured so patiently the scorn and the shame of His bitter cross, it is He who shall then be manifested as the Glorious King and Judge of human kind, and upon whom every eye of sinner and of saint shall then be turned.

For by that look will there arise an extremity of woe and of gladness, the possibility of which has never yet been realised. There are the two sides. It may be well to consider both.

Is not the eye frequently the inlet of the greatest possible dismay, alarm, terror, and distress? Imagine the men of the old world as they saw the door of the Ark close, and then by and by saw the huge raindrops descend, and watched the rising waters until every ray of hope was quenched.

Imagine the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah

as they saw the words of Lot fulfilled and the fire descend from above on the doomed cities.

Imagine the company of Korah as the ground began to heave beneath their feet and the vast chasm open its mouth to receive them.

Imagine the conscience-stricken Ahab as he saw the prophet Elijah standing in the field of Naboth, the very sight of the faithful servant of Jehovah awakening him to all the judgments which his sin was bringing upon him.

Imagine a man coming home from Australia with the earnings of a life's labour, and seeing the vessel with it all sinking in the depths.

Or imagine the parent watching by the deathbed of the child in whom all his hopes were centred, who had been the idol of his home and the one object for whom he had lived.

Or, once again, imagine a criminal in the dock, and what his feeling would be to see in the witness-box the man who has been the repository of all his secret plots of evil, or on the bench the strict and impartial judge who will surely condemn the man that is found guilty.

Now think what will the sight of Christ be to the unsaved man. In that sight will be every possible element of grief and distress.

Every idol of his heart will be dashed to pieces

in a moment. Whether it be home or wife or child, a high position or a store of wealth, the fruit of a life's toil or the wonted enjoyment of some gift of Divine Providence, whatever it may be, it becomes a thing of the past. The stream is dried up; time is no more, and time's possessions have passed out of his hand.

From that sight will arise the shame of discovery. However cleverly the plot has been laid or the deed of evil hidden from the eyes of men, there will be no more possibility of concealment. The eyes which are as a flame of fire see through every disguise. The impenitent sinner must stand naked and confounded, with his sin open and known to all.

A soldier had been found out in the commission of a deed of darkness. He was tried by a court-martial and condemned to be shot. When the hour approached he was in the utmost terror. "It is not death I fear," said the man, "but how can I bear the sight of two thousand soldiers looking upon me in my disgrace?" What will it be for the sinner to stand exposed to the gaze of unnumbered multitudes in the day when every secret of his heart and life is made manifest. Then, too, conscience will speak out, and can no longer be silenced. As the sight of Elijah brought the sin of Ahab to his remembrance, what will it be when men see Him

against whom they have sinned, and who knows them altogether? Ah! the reproach, the remorse, the sting of conscience on that day! Too often it slumbers now. It is drugged by the Devil's opiates. It sleeps on, silenced by false hopes, by low views of sin, by promises of future amendment, or by the idea of mercy in God, even where that mercy has been despised and rejected.

But then it will sleep no more. The sight of a coming Judge will effectually and for ever dispel all its illusions. In no uncertain tone will the voice be heard: “Thou art the man!” “What hast thou done?”

Moreover, that sight will be to the sinner the token of the coming day of wrath. What the first raindrops were to the men of the old world, what the bursting of the storm of fire was to Sodom, what the trembling earth was to the company of Korah, that will the first sight of Christ be to the sinner hereafter. It will be the end of all uncertainty. It will sweep away in a moment a thousand questionings. It will bring a revelation of the Divine judgment against sin and ungodliness and unbelief which none can withstand. What will then be the despair of those who pierced Him? How will those meet it who have crucified Him afresh by their sins? Alas for the reviler and blasphemer, the profligate and the drunk-

ard, for those who have denied Christ, and for those who have taught others to reject His salvation ! How will such be able to behold the dazzling majesty of His presence, the throng of His attendants, and the earth shaken to its centre ? We have a glimpse given of the scene that we may look for. "The kings of the earth and the great men and the rich men . . . hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb ; for the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand ?" Yes, "every eye shall see Him." For through rock and mountain and cave that eye shall still behold him. No hiding-place will be deep enough or dark enough to cover him from sight. Think of it, brother, thou who art yet in thy sins. Think of it, sister, who art yet kept back from Him by the shadows of earth. Would it not be well to seek a hiding-place now ? Would it not be well, even this very day, to flee from the anticipation of His wrath to the arms of His mercy ? Would it not be well now to fix thine eye on Him in deep self-abasement and humble trust ? Hidden in Him, covered with His all-sufficient merit, and arrayed in His snow-white robe of righteousness, what then shalt thou fear ? What then will the presence of

His glory be to thee but the most blissful sight that ever thou hast seen ?

For the brighter side of this subject must not be forgotten.

If the eye be the inlet of fear and dismay, it is no less the inlet of joy too deep for words to express.

Imagine the joy of Abraham and Sarah in the sight of the child so long promised and so long waited for.

Remember the old patriarch Jacob and the gladness he must have experienced when again he saw his long-lost son, and saw him as ruler of the land of Egypt. Think of the delight of the shepherds as they beheld the infant Jesus, in whom they had learnt to recognise the Saviour of the world ; or of the Eastern Magi, as with exceeding great joy they again beheld the star which pointed to Him. Or you can picture to yourself the full heart of the loving wife as she sees the ship that brings her husband home to her after a long voyage.

Or look at it in another way. Here is a man who has long set his heart on the accomplishment of some great and noble object. It has been his one aim and prayer for many a year. Perhaps it has been the building of a church in some poor or neglected neighbourhood. Perhaps it has been the founding of an asylum for orphan children. And

now the desire of a lifetime has been fulfilled. What untold pleasure and thankfulness it awakens within him as he sees the reward of his toil and the answer to so many prayers!

And in the believer's sight of the coming King something similar to every one of these elements of grateful joy will be found, and will burst forth in fullest measure.

It will be gladness in its highest form, and with no single cause of alloy.

I remember well an old servant of Christ who faithfully followed the Master for upwards of sixty years. A few years before his death his sight suddenly failed him. He sought advice, but he was told that it was impossible to provide a cure. He would never see again whilst he lived. A bright and happy thought awoke within the heart of the good man." "Then the next person I shall see will be my Saviour," said this faithful servant of his Lord.

And what that sight will be to a Christian man, who can express?

In that sight all heart-joys meet. Raise your thoughts to the very highest conceptions of sanctified hope and expectation, and that moment will surpass them all.

Here will be *the desire of the soul fulfilled.* We

read that "hope deferred maketh the heart sick; but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life." Through long centuries has the Church waited for the return of her Lord.

Year after year has the earnest and wakeful believer been looking for "that blessed hope," even the glorious appearing of the Son of God. And now the day has come. No more waiting, weary days. No more triumphing of the wicked. No more hiding the pure truth of God beneath the covering of human traditions. No more sorrow or sin to trouble the Christian's heart. The blest day has come with all its rich treasury of deliverance, peace, and victory.

Here will be *mutual love abundantly satisfied*. The Bridegroom will rejoice in the Bride, and the Bride will be satisfied for ever in the presence of her Lord. It is said by Solomon, "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing;" and we find it true in our present state. But it will not be true then. "Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty;" and this sight will be enough. It will be the one great joy of the redeemed for ever. To see Christ, to be with Him, to look deeper into His loving heart, and to share that love through endless ages, this will be the chiefest element in the pleasures which are at God's right hand.

“EVERY EYE.”

“The King there in His beauty
 Without a veil is seen ;
 It were a well-spent journey
 Though seven deaths lay between.
 The Lamb with His fair army
 Doth on Mount Zion stand,
 And glory, glory dwelleth
 In Emmanuel’s land.

The Bride eyes not her garment,
 But her dear Bridegroom’s face ;
 I will not gaze at glory,
 But on my King of Grace.
 Not at the crown He giveth,
 But on His pierced hand ;
 The Lamb is all the glory
 Of Emmanuel’s land.”

Here will be *the transforming power of this sight*: Consider the words of St. John in his First Epistle, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God ; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be ; but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (iii. 2). There will be a perfect conformity to His image. Sin will be annihilated in the soul, and no temptation ever be able to stir one thought of evil. This mortal body will put on its garments of glory and immortality. In heavenly purity, in unwearied brightness and activity, in an atmosphere of love, born of the love that

inflames the heart of Christ, the risen saint will be satisfied as he awakes in the likeness of His Saviour. And with the sight of Christ Himself there will be ten thousand sights that will multiply indefinitely the Christian's joy. What will it be to behold angel and archangel, cherubim and seraphim, and all doing homage to Him whom we love?

What will it be to see the saints of olden times, prophets, apostles, martyrs, those whose words have been a guide to us along our journey here?

What will it be to see those who have been dear to us in the flesh, and who fell asleep in Christ before ourselves?

What will it be to see those to whom God has made us instruments of spiritual good, who through our prayers, efforts, or influence have been led to the Saviour's feet?

What will be the sight of that city pictured to us in the Revelation in such glowing words, but whose true glory and beauty no heart of mortal man has ever yet conceived?

Christian, rejoice! This sight is for thee. This hope is for thee. Unworthy in thine own eyes; oft lamenting thine own infirmities, thy want of love, thy failings in the Master's service; yet thine eyes shall see and thy heart shall overflow with the joys which are at God's right hand.

"Every eye shall see Him!"

Then let thine eye now ever be toward Him. Watch, lest thine eye be turned aside. Let it never be found "beholding vanity." Let it not be accustomed to delight itself in the unwholesome sights of the theatre, or the vain display of self-adornment, or in that which only ministers to the gratification of pride and self-indulgence. Let not thine eye shoot forth glances of envy, passion, covetousness, or any unholy thought or desire. Let it not slumber in carnal ease and selfish sloth whilst souls are perishing around.

Nay, let thine eye be upward, seeking daily aid and grace from above. Be ever looking unto Jesus as thy great Pattern and Exemplar, and also as the Fountain-head of all supplies of wisdom, strength, and consolation.

But more than this. Let thine eye look around thee to see the wants and miseries of mankind. Then, with a heart of sympathy and a tongue of love, go forth to cheer and help thy brothers and sisters in their distress, and to guide the wanderer back to the fold.

As the good Samaritan looked on the man who had fallen among thieves, and then in self-denying pity stretched out his hand to help, to heal, and to save him, so be it your happy privilege to minister,

wheresoever you can, to the child of sorrow and of want. Let your “eye affect your heart,” and then spare neither time, nor trouble, nor toil, nor means to raise the fallen, to comfort the mourning, or to save the lost.

Then with double joy shall thine eye behold the coming King, and shall receive from His lips a double reward, that inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of His brethren, ye have done it unto Him.

Thou shalt rise ! my dust, thou shalt arise,
Not always closed thine eyes :
 Thy life's first Giver
 Will give thee life for ever.
 Ah, praise His name !

Then as they who dream, we shall arise
With Jesus to the skies,
 And find that morrow,
 The weary pilgrim's sorrow,
 All past and gone !

Then within the holiest I tread,
By my Redeemer led,
 Through heaven soaring,
 His holy name adoring
 Eternally !

II.

THE GLORY OF THE INCARNATE SAVIOUR.

“ The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”—JOHN i. 14.

IT is the will of God that men should glory in Christ alone. He is called “ the glory of His people Israel ” (Luke ii. 32).

But not only is Christ to become in the future the glory of the Jewish nation, but even now is He the glory of the true Israel of God. In Him “ shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory ” (Isa. xlvi. 25).

Unto the children of God He is made of God “ wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption, that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord ” (1 Cor. i. 30, 31).

To glory in Christ brings glory and honour to the Father ; for “ He that honoureth the Son honoureth the Father also.”

To glory in Christ is the secret of true rest and peace. We may not glory in ourselves. We may

not glory in riches or natural gifts, or the praise of man, or in any attainments we may make. We must learn to abase ourselves, to own our utter insufficiency, our ignorance, our exceeding sinfulness, our inability to do anything aright of ourselves, and resort to Christ and glory in Him as the spring of all hope, strength, and consolation.

“ Be Thou my rejoicing, my stronghold of love,
My aim and my end :
My glory on earth and my glory above,
O Jesus my Friend.”

But how may this be ? How may you learn thus to glory in Christ and rejoice in Him evermore ? It can only be as you learn to know more of Him in His person, in His character, in His word, His work, and His offices. Hence Christians are bidden to “ grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ” (2 Pet. iii. 18).

Therefore let it be your constant prayer—“ Lord Jesus, show me Thy glory ! Manifest Thyself to me as Thou dost not unto the world ! Make me to know Thee more fully, that I trust Thee and love Thee more and more.”

In this spirit study these words of the Beloved Apostle. In this passage He reveals to us bright rays of the Redeemer’s glory. May each glimpse of Christ which we behold here, draw our hearts more closely to Him !

First we have in this passage *the glory of Christ in a past eternity*. The Divine nature of Christ shines out very clearly in these words. He is not a frail growth of time, a very beautiful flower of humanity, but the Rock of Ages, the Eternal One manifesting Himself in a garment of flesh. He is spoken of by a title never applied but to Himself, "the only-begotten of the Father." He is spoken of as "The Word" that was in the beginning with God, and who was God. He is described as the Mighty Creator, for "all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made" (v. 3).

Three times in the New Testament is He thus spoken of as the Author of Creation. In this passage twice is the crown of creating power placed upon His head (v. 3 and 10). In the Epistle to the Colossians we have the same truth set before us, in a still stronger light. He is the Upholder and Preserver of all things, as well as their Creator. Moreover, taking the widest possible range of creating power, everything is declared to be "for Him" as its end and purpose.

"By Him were all things created that are in Heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers: all things were created by Him

and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist" (Col. i. 16, 17).

Again, in the Epistle to the Hebrews we have the same view of His glory. Side by side with His redeeming work in purging away our sins, are we told that the Father "by Him made the worlds," and, moreover, that He upholds "all things by the word of His power" (Heb. i. 2, 3).

Here is one ground for a Christian's glorying. The Saviour in whom you trust is the eternal Son of God. He is one with the Father. He is the Creator of all worlds, and by His own might holds up the pillars of the universe. Can you not trust a Saviour like this? You are a poor trembling child of dust. You are often ready to faint, and your heart sinks within you as you survey troubles that threaten you, and temptations that you cannot withstand. But rejoice in this, that you have a strong Saviour. He is very nigh to the Father, and He can bring you near and keep you near to Him in favour and loving-kindness. He created all things, and He can create you anew "in righteousness and true holiness." When no means are apparent for some pressing emergency, He who made all things out of nothing can provide easily for your urgent need. When you feel utterly helpless, He who made the strong mountains can make you strong by the inwork-

ing of His grace. He who puts forth His arm to hold up every planet in its course, can uphold you in your Christian walk in spite of manifold hindrances and stumbling-blocks. "Thou hast a mighty arm : strong is Thy hand, and high is Thy right hand !" Yea, Lord Jesus, on Thy mighty arm I will lean ! Thy strong hand shall hold my feeble one ! Thy right hand, which is high as Heaven over- all the powers of evil, shall put down all my spiritual foes, and lift me up to Thine own glory and kingdom !

But we have here a second feature of Christ's glory, *that of His incarnation and birth*. "When Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man, Thou didst not abhor the virgin's womb." "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*"—R.V. Though this gospel tells us nothing of the story of Gabriel's visit and the subsequent history of His conception and birth, yet are they clearly implied in the words of the Apostle.

"Will God in very deed dwell with man on the earth ?" In Paradise He came and walked with man as a friend walketh with a friend. Through the Jewish dispensation He dwelt with His people in type and shadow in the temple, in the pillar-cloud, and by the Angel of His presence manifested from time to time. But now in the fulness of time He

has come and dwelt with man as never before. We know the wondrous story. As Advent and Christmas come round year by year we see the lowly maiden of Nazareth, and remember the marvellous honour that was put upon her. We visit the plains of Bethlehem, and hear the voice of the heavenly visitor, “I bring unto you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” We visit the stable at the inn, and we behold the only sinless infant that was ever seen on earth; the Sinless One, yet the sin-bearer, the Saviour!

And what is the special glory of Christ in His incarnation? Surely, it is the glory of *His condescension*. So high, yet so lowly! The God whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, yet wrapped in swaddling-clothes and lying in a manger! The Up-holder of all things, and yet nourished at a mother’s breast! The King of the Eternal Palace, the One who dwelt in the High and Holy Place, and yet “no room for Him in the inn.” Ah, lesson for proud man, such we can learn nowhere else! Did He in lowly guise stoop so low for thee to redeem, to save, to bless, and wilt thou through pride reject the benefit? If He became so humble to bring to thy door the glorious promise of life, wilt thou refuse

to take a low place, to own thy sin, to become as a little child, that thou mayest enter His Kingdom?

Shall He stoop to save, and wilt thou not stoop to be saved?

Yea, Lord, Thy humility, Thy condescension, has shattered in pieces my tower of pride. No longer will I glory in myself or in anything I have. I will be nothing, if only Thou, the lowly One, will come and abide with me. For now, Lord, Thou dost descend to dwell in the mean cottage of the human heart. Come thus and dwell in me and stay with me all my days!

A third feature of Christ's glory shines forth in these words. He not only descended to earth and took our nature upon Him, but "*He dwelt among us.*" He pitched His tent here below, and lived nearly half the lifetime of man amongst the children of sin and sorrow. Oh, what a shining forth of pity and mercy and goodness was here! He might have descended from Heaven, and then, having wrought some mighty deliverance for man, have at once returned to His home in glory. But for three and thirty long years the Son of God lived as a brotherman, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

Some of us have read much of late of the bitter cry of outcast London. It is well we should hear that cry. It is well we should feel most deeply for

the wretchedness, the hopeless gloom, the mingled wickedness, temptation, and terrible sorrows that encompass tens of thousands in our great cities. It is well also we should bear in mind that no leverage less than the glorious gospel of God's grace in Jesus can ever raise them from it. But consider for a moment what it would be for some man of virtuous life and refined taste to live some two or three years in the midst of such dens of vice and misery. And what must it have been for the holy Son of God, so sensitive to the evil around, so tender-hearted, to have lived for nearly the third of a century in our sinful, sorrowful world, presenting such a contrast to the High and Holy Place where for ever He had abode in fellowship with the Father!

And what a glory shone forth from that wondrous life of His! What a glory rested upon Him in those scenes where the Father bore witness of Him, as in His baptism and transfiguration! What a glory was there in those words of love and grace which fell from His lips, and which have been such a precious heritage to His Church ever since! What a glory was there in each of those works of mercy when He healed the sick, and raised the dead, and cleansed the leper, and opened the eyes of the blind! What Divine Majesty shone out from beneath the humble garb of the Nazarene when He

could feed a multitude with a few loaves and fishes, or still the angry waves with the command, "Peace, be still!"

Still brighter was the glory that shone forth from the patient Lamb of God during His last sufferings! There was scarcely any possible form of shame or suffering which mingled not in His cup.

And through it all there was scarcely any possible virtue or grace that did not stand forth in its very brightest colours. What unshaken courage, as He so bravely faced His enemies, and testified of His coming glory! What meekness and long sufferance was there in the silence which bore up against all that was spoken or done against Him! What unselfish kindness in His words to the women who followed Him, in His touch of the ear of Malchus, in His thoughtfulness for the safety of His disciples in the garden, and the comfort of His mother after His death. What prayerfulness, what trustfulness, what perseverance in well-doing do we see right on to the end!

Christian, ever behold this glory of Christ, and some reflection of it will illumine your own character. There is no way to become holy so sure as the calm, reverential, and loving study of Christ's beautiful life and death!

Looking for the aid of God's Holy Spirit, gaze

upon Christ and ponder every incident of His wonderful sojourn here below.

From a single word or sentence there will often come forth some exquisite trait of holiness, faith, or love, that will be a fresh jewel in our crown, if we are enabled in any way to live it out in our own Christian life. O, let your thoughts and meditations move in the atmosphere of Christ's life and death! Reckon no time lost which brings you more knowledge of him!

“I journey through a desert drear and wild,
Yet is my heart by such sweet thoughts beguiled
Of Him on whom I lean, my strength, my stay,
I can forget the sorrows of the way.

Thoughts of His love—the root of every grace
Which finds in this poor heart a dwelling-place ;
The sunshine of my soul, than day more bright,
And my calm pillow of repose by night.

Thoughts of His sojourn in this vale of tears ;—
The tale of love, unfolded in those years
Of sinless suffering and patient grace,
I love again and yet again to trace.

Thoughts of His death ; upon the cross I gaze,
And there behold its sad yet healing rays ;
Beacon of hope, which lifted up on high,
Illumes with heavenly light the tear-dimmed eye.”

Yet once again behold the glory of Christ in this passage. The Evangelist cannot close this view of

the Incarnate Saviour without fixing our thoughts upon one thing. He was "*full of grace and truth.*"

In the law was severity and shadow, judgment without mercy against sin, and but the type and figure of the good things of the Gospel. But in Christ is the very opposite. In Him is abounding grace to meet all forms of sin ; in Him is the reality and the substance of all spiritual blessings.

To Him man may come for all needs to be supplied and for all sins to be forgiven.

" O Jesus, full of truth and grace,
 More full of grace than I of sin,
 Yet once again I seek Thy face,
 Open Thine arms and take me in ;
 And freely my backslidings heal,
 And love the faithless sinner still."

Where is there a soul down deep in the depths of sin and utter misery and woe ? For such a one there is grace in Jesus.

I remember one in fair position of life, who had in former days been a governess, but through the power of strong drink had fallen very low. When I spoke to her of a better life, she pointed downwards with a despairing look—" *I'm down there.*" " Yes," I said, " that is true, but Christ's arm reaches you 'down there.' He pities you 'down there,' and His grace is enough to raise you up to peace and hope."

I had some reason to think that the word was not in vain, and that she looked to Him who is able to save to the uttermost.

You likewise may be down, down in the very depths of sin and darkness and despair. Past guilt, like a huge mountain in your path, bars your progress. Strong temptations threaten to drag you still lower. Your surroundings may be all against you, and hinder you rising to anything better and nobler. Yet, remember, Christ is full of grace, and that grace is for you if you will ask for it. Let this be your refuge and your hope. Lift up your eyes to Him whose arm is almighty, and reaches down to you just where you are. Look up to Him who never yet despised a sinner however vile. And yield yourself wholly to Him. Believe that He will take you as you are. Believe that He will freely forgive all that is past. Believe that His rich and free grace will meet all your need, and overcome all your temptations. Believe that He will make a way of escape from all the bitter ills which now oppress you. Believe and rejoice. You shall not be disappointed. Only keep looking to Him. You are full of sin, but He is full of mercy. You are full of all that is low, and carnal, and earthly; but He is full of the grace that can lift you above it. You are full of sore trouble, but He is full of con-

solation, binding up the broken-hearted, and comforting all that mourn. Therefore go to Jesus; trust in Jesus; cling to Jesus; glory in Jesus; and you shall have cause hereafter to rejoice that His power, and goodness, and grace, have made you a monument of mercy to His own eternal praise.

THOUGHTS ON EXODUS XXV.

WITHIN the Tabernacle door,
My soul, what dost thou see ?
'Tis JESUS, JESUS, everywhere,
That shows Himself to me.

The "Holy Place" is full of Light,
A Light that goes out never !
'Tis JESUS, who has changed my night
To day that lasts for ever.

The "Holy Place" has holy Food,
Each Sabbath newly spread :
'Tis JESUS that I here behold,
The true and living Bread.

Upon the Ark, a Mercy-Seat ;
A perfect Law, within :
'Tis JESUS, "full of Grace and Truth,"
Atoning for my sin.

O JESUS ! Thou art all in all !
I care for none like Thee !
All else be hidden from my sight,
But show THYSELF to me !

III.

AN ADVENT PRAYER.

“Jesus, remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom.”—
LUKE xxiii. 42 (Revised Version).

IT was a dark hour. Look beneath the cross. The whole world is in arms against God and His Christ. Then did the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing. Then did the rulers carry out that which they counselled against the Lord and against His Anointed. Then far and wide was the proud boast foretold in prophecy fulfilled—“Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their cords from us.”

The Roman world is against Christ, for Pilate has given Him up to death. The Ecclesiastical world, the heads of the Jewish Church, have condemned Him in their Council.

The world of the common people, the mixed populace, share in the sin of their rulers, for they cried “Crucify Him! crucify Him!”

And now all around the cross, the soldiers, the

chief priests, the passers-by, all join in profane mockery of the Crucified. Even one of the thieves rails upon Him with the unbelieving scoff—"If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us."

But shall none take the part of our King in His day of shame and suffering? Shall no one dare to say a word on behalf of the world's Redeemer? Yes, but who shall it be?

Shall it be John who leaned on His bosom? Shall it be Peter who professed to love Him above all? Shall it be one of the other ten, His own chosen Apostles?

Nay, Judas has betrayed Him. Peter has denied Him, and is weeping in secret. John is caring for the Lord's mother. The rest have forsaken Him and fled. Who then shall it be? A strange confessor, a thief, a malefactor! He declares the Saviour's innocence, as he owns his own guiltiness. It was a brave thing for this man to rebuke his brother malefactor—"Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man hath done nothing amiss" (Luke xxiii. 40, 41).

But he does not stop here. He advances a step. He turns to Christ with this marvellous Advent prayer. Though spoken to Christ, it was spoken in the hearing of the unbelieving throng, and was a

glorious answer to all the scorn and mockery of that hour.

His kingly dignity has been scorned on every side. The mock sceptre, the purple robe, the bowed knee, the superscription on the cross, the soldiers' taunt, "If Thou be the King of the Jews, save Thyself,"—all tell the same tale. Jesus, a King! A King without a throne, a King without an army, a King without a follower! Such Christ might have seemed at that moment. Then arose the victorious faith of the malefactor. He looked away from that crowd of mockers. He looked away from the shame and suffering of the Redeemer. He looked through the dark shadows of that day, through the cross, through the grave, and his faith could discern on the horizon the dawn of a brighter day. He could see the Sun of Righteousness, now setting in gloom, arising again in majesty and power.

He could see a glorious King, a cloud, and myriads of ministering angels. He could see that Crucified One holding in His hand the reins of universal dominion.

Here was faith indeed! Here was faith in spite of everything that could make against it! Here was faith, perhaps greater than that of any one of God's saints, and found in one who had been aforetime an outcast and a rebel against God!

"Jesus, remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom!"

Translate this prayer into its full significance. There are but nine words in the original as in our version, yet what depths of meaning lie hidden beneath them.

"Lord, I see Thee dying on Thy bitter Cross, but I believe Thee to be far other than Thou seemest. I believe Thee to be a mighty glorious King, and that death cannot rob Thee of Thy power. I believe there is a day coming when all Thine enemies shall feel Thy hand. In majesty and great glory Thou shalt come to rule, to reign, to judge. And when it shall be, then think of me! Think of the poor thief that hung by Thy side! Think of him that he cried to Thee, and owned Thy name, when all the world derided Thee! Oh, remember him at that Day, and give him to share Thy glory, Thine inheritance, and Thy kingdom for ever!"

"Jesus, remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom!"

Go deeper into this prayer. Three great truths seem plainly implied in the words of the malefactor.

(1.) *He believed that he himself should live on in the great future.*

Death was not the end. When the pain of the cross was over, there was another life yet to be known.

When taken down from his cross and laid in a few feet of earth, his spirit would live on and on and on in the world which no mortal eye has yet penetrated. Whilst the other malefactor was only desiring to be saved from present suffering, this man was looking forward into the great unseen.

Let us ever hold fast by this truth. "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen ; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." A cruel, treacherous materialism is abroad, which would limit a man's destiny to threescore years and ten. But the conscience of the whole family of man refuses to believe it. The soul of man is immortal. For weal or for woe, brother, sister, you must live on. You cannot get quit of the responsibility of an abiding life.

A mother stood by an open window looking at the setting sun. A little boy of five was standing by her side. "My boy," she said, "when that sun has ceased to rise and set, you will still live. You must live on as long as God Himself." The lad never forgot his mother's words. They led him to the Saviour, in whom alone this abiding life is life indeed.

Will you remember this likewise ? Do not forget it. Do not pass it by. Do not make light of it. You possess the marvellous gift of immortality. It

may be your unspeakable gain. It may be to you an intolerable burden. But live on you must. Think of it well. All else compared to it is but child's play. "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

2. Another point is no less implied in the words. The thief had not the shadow of a doubt that Christ would return in glory. He sought a remembrance when Christ should come. Of the event itself he had no question. I know not where the man gained this knowledge and faith. Had he perchance heard the prophecy of Christ's appearing which He had spoken to His disciples a few days previously? Had there been conveyed to him the words of Christ in the high priest's house as He stood upon His trial, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven"? (Matt. xxvi. 64.) We cannot tell. But the man believed it, and so let us also. Let us look upon it as a great reality. I know that centuries have passed by since Christ proclaimed it. I know that many there are who disbelieve it. I know that the very Bride herself too often fails to anticipate the Bridegroom's coming. But nevertheless that day is sure and certain. "Heaven and earth shall pass away," but the word of Christ that tells of His majesty and kingdom shall not fail. It comes as the reward of His humilia-

tion. It comes as the day of manifestation for His people. It comes to make plain the justice and equity of God in His dealings with man. It comes to convince the ungodly of all their ungodly words and deeds. It comes, and it comes speedily. Who is prepared for that momentous hour? "Be ye therefore ready, for at such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."

Nor must we omit to name another thought which underlies this wonderful prayer. The thief believed that he should live on beyond the grave. He believed that the dying Redeemer would assuredly come again in glory. But he believed also that his eternal bliss or woe depended solely on the will of Christ. The verdict of life or death would hang on the word of Him who was dying by his side. If He showed a kind remembrance of him, all must be well. His favour was peace and glory, His frown destruction.

Ever reckon this the one all-important matter. Christ is the Great Judge, the Great Decider of your eternal destiny. Let your chief aim be to secure His friendship. Nothing else is worthy to be compared with this. Remember how earnestly the Gibeonites sought the favour of Joshua. What craft and guile they used that in the day of battle he might stand on their side and not fight against them, Will not you

as earnestly crave the friendship and succour of our Great Captain that in the all-decisive day He may stand by you and make your cause His own? Will you not come to Him in this your day of grace, that in the day of account He may acknowledge you as His own?

One thing more we find in the prayer of this man. There was *an actual casting of himself upon the mercy and compassion of Christ*. Filled with a sense of his own need and misery, assured of the kingly power and authority of Christ, he committed his soul to His care. The remembrance he sought was neither more nor less than this. It was the rolling of his weary, guilty, sin-stained soul upon Him who had power to save even to the uttermost.

Here is the very hinge on which salvation turns. By the light of the Holy Spirit you must know yourself a sinner needing a Saviour. By the same Spirit you must know Christ as able and willing and faithful to save. Then you must cast yourself by faith into His mighty and merciful arms. You must give yourself up wholly to Him to save you from sin and all its consequences. It is thus you will find a hope that will never make you ashamed.

An old story tells of a lad who had fallen from a high building. His foot caught by a narrow ledge, and thus he was saved from being killed on the spot.

But he could neither get back to the roof, nor get to the ground. However, a strong man stood beneath and offered to catch him in his arms if he would throw himself back. He did so, and he was saved from a terrible death.

In the same way the sinner must venture himself on Christ by casting away every other confidence, and committing himself to His power and grace.

“A guilty, poor, and helpless worm,
On Thy kind arms I fall ;
Be Thou my strength, my righteousness,
My Jesus, and my all.”

The faith of the malefactor obtained a great recompense. The Saviour’s merciful reply affords another example of the joy it is to Him to receive all who come to Him. It shows plainly that He is more ready to hear than we to pray, and is wont to give more than we desire or deserve.

“Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise.”

The thief asks but for a *remembrance*: Christ promises him *His presence*. The thief asks for this remembrance at the *day of Christ’s appearing*: He promises a place in paradise *that very day*; whilst in the background of the promise there lay the assurance of the very blessing he sought, even glory and honour when He should come again.

A few touching lines have been written with reference both to the prayer and to the response that it met with.

“At length

The pale glad lips have breathed their trembling prayer,
 ‘O Lord, remember me.’ The hosts of God,
 With wistful, angel faces, bending low
 Above their dying King, were surely stirred
 To wonder at the cry. Not one of all
 The shining host had dared to speak to Him
 In that dread hour of woe, when heaven and earth
 Stood trembling and amazed ; yet, lo ! the voice
 Of one who speaks to Him, who dares to pray,
 ‘O Lord, remember me !’ A sinful man
 May make his pitiful appeal to Christ,
 The sinner’s Friend, where angels dare not speak ;
 And sweetly from the dying lips that day
 The answer came.

Oh strange and solemn joy

Which broke upon the fading face of him
 Who there received the promise, ‘Thou shalt be
 In paradise this night with Me.’
 And thus the Lord fulfilled His word ; He spake
 Of giving rest, and on the bitter cross
 He gave the promised rest. O Christ the King,
 We also wander on the desert hills.
 Though haunted by Thy call, returning sweet
 At morn and eve, we will not come to Thee,
 Till Thou hast nailed us on some bitter cross,
 And made us look on Thine ; and driven at last
 To call on Thee with trembling and all tears,
 Thou lookest down in love, upbraiding not,
 And promising Thy kingdom.”¹

¹ From a volume of poems, “Ezekiel,” by B. M.

“Jesus, remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom.”

Let the spirit of this prayer often find an echo in thy heart. Around this thought of God’s remembrance of His people cluster several most helpful prayers of Scripture.

“Remember me, O my God, for good” (Neh. xiii. 31).

“Remember, O Lord, Thy tender mercies and loving kindnesses, for they have been ever of old. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to Thy mercy remember Thou me for Thy goodness’ sake, O Lord” (Ps. xxv. 6, 7).

“Remember me, O Lord, with the favour which Thou bearest unto Thy people. O visit me with Thy salvation” (Ps. cvi. 4).

And then comes in this of the thief, far the noblest of them all—“Jesus, remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom.”

Oh pray this prayer from your very heart! If Christ remembers you, no matter who forgets you! If Christ remembers you in loving-kindness, you may dry your tears and hush your sorrows to rest, and begin to sing a song of everlasting joy.

If Christ is thinking of you, and cares for you, what danger need appal you, what want distress you, what fears harass and trouble you?

Then pray in faith that Jesus would remember you.

"Lord Jesus, remember me in mercy! Remember me when the sins of the past weigh heavily upon my soul. Remember me when temptation is strong, and my evil heart is against me. Remember me when the snares of the world are as a net about my feet. Remember me when all seems dark around me, and neither sun nor moon nor stars appear. Remember me, O Lord, and care for me still. Remember me when I am lonely, desolate, and oppressed. Remember me when I lay my dear ones in the dust. Remember me when the last struggle is at hand, and hold me up lest I sink in the waves of Jordan. Remember me at that great and awful day when I see Thee on the great white throne. Lord Jesus, remember me now and for evermore!"

Nor forget that there is the converse of this appeal you make to Christ. Christ makes an appeal to you. He bids you remember Him. He would say, "My child, remember me right through your pilgrimage. Remember Him who suffered and died for thee. Remember Him who for thy sake left His home above. My child, remember Me at all times. Remember Me in the busy throng and in the solitude of thine own chamber. Remember Me when beloved ones are around thee, as dearer than any earthly tie.

Remember Me when Satan would draw thee from My fold. Remember Me when all human companionship fails. Remember Me at My table, and meet Me there in faith and humility as you partake of the tokens of My love. Yes, remember Me for evermore. Remember My love, My fidelity, My sure promises, My work, My people. Remember Me until thou seest me face to face in the eternal home I have prepared for thee."

Eternally blessed are they who remember the Lord, and whose names are written in His book of remembrance.

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a *book of remembrance* was written before Him for them that feared the Lord and *that thought upon His name*. And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels" (Mal. iii. 16, 17).

"O thou, my soul, forget no more
The Friend who all thy sorrows bore ;
Let every idol be forgot,
But Him, my soul, forget thou not.

Renounce thy works and ways with grief,
And fly to this Divine relief ;
Nor Him forget who left His throne,
And for thy life gave up His own.

Eternal truth and mercy shine
In Him, and He Himself is thine ;
And canst thou then, with sin beset,
Such charms, such matchless charms forget ?

Oh no ! till life itself depart,
His name shall warm and cheer my heart ;
And lisping this from earth, I'll rise
To join the chorus of the skies."¹

¹ Written by the first Hindoo convert in Burmah.

IV.

HOLY LIVING IN PREPARATION FOR CHRIST'S APPEARING.

“The God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly: and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”—
I THESS. v. 23 (Revised Version).

WHO can estimate too highly the value of a holy life? It is the purpose of Christ’s redeeming work. He “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit. ii. 14).

It is absolutely essential to the enjoyment of true peace. Whatever doctrines persons hold or spiritual feelings they may enjoy, they are of no real benefit to them unless they lead to a holy walk. Sin is like an aching tooth, and wherever it is permitted to abide there can be no true rest or peace.

Moreover, holy living is one of the mightiest powers for good in the Church of Christ.

A congregation eminent for the holiness of its members is like a burning-glass manifesting the rays

of the Divine glory, and having a power to set on fire the hearts of men, and to inflame them with zeal in God's service. A single Christian who is living a very holy and devoted life cannot fail to be a blessing wheresoever he lives, and the least word he speaks for Christ is mighty because backed up by his own example.

Therefore seek to be holy. You are God's representative in an evil world. You are to adorn the doctrine of Christ in all things. You are to strive to be a blessing to others. You desire to enjoy the peace of God which passeth understanding. Therefore you must be holy. You must make it your distinct aim every day you live to perfect holiness in the fear of God.

Look at the prayer of the Apostle at the heading of this address. Turn it into a petition for yourself. Plead it before God in the name of Jesus in all its fulness of meaning.

"O God, the God of peace, I look unto Thee. I have no help but in Thee. Thou only canst make me holy by the power of Thy good Spirit. Do Thy work in me thoroughly. Let no evil thing remain. May every power of mind and body be set apart for Thy service. Oh keep me and preserve me day by day. Make me blameless and without rebuke. Prepare me to stand without fault before Christ at the

great day of His coming, I ask this for Jesus' sake. Amen."

But if you wish to be holy and earnestly long to be made like Christ in all things, you must weigh well the teaching of the Word of God. You must follow the light which that Word affords.

I will name a few points of main importance.

You can only be sanctified by God as you know Him as the "God of peace." Before you can be made holy, you must be at peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ. You must begin with free forgiveness and complete reconciliation through His blood. True holiness rests on the basis of a perfect justification, whereby you stand before God in Christ accounted righteous in His sight. There are some who try to climb up to justification and acceptance by their holiness or good works or good feelings. But they always fail. It is just the other way. You are not to be holy that you may be forgiven; but you are to be forgiven and justified that you may become holy. You must begin on the lowest round. You must take the place of the sinner, and then look to Christ to pardon and justify you freely through His blood and righteousness.

"Mine is the sin, but Thine the righteousness,

Mine is the guilt, but Thine the cleansing blood;

Here is my robe, my refuge, and my peace,

Thy blood, Thy righteousness, O Lord my God."

You can only be sanctified by *the indwelling power of the Holy Ghost*. Remember the words of St. Paul. “God hath chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thess. ii. 13). It is only as the Holy Ghost the Comforter dwells within you and reigns within you as a new power and a new life that you can in any wise rise above your own evil nature and think or act aright. From the first desire to live a better life to the first note of praise in glory the whole work must be that of the Holy Spirit.

Hence you must by all means seek to realise and enjoy the constant presence of the Holy Ghost. Remind yourself frequently of your need of His power and grace. Let it be your persistent, believing cry that the Father would send the Spirit to work mightily in you. Let it be your greatest sorrow in any way to grieve that blessed Spirit, either by wilful sin or by slighting His motions in your heart. Often breathe forth a longing desire for His humbling, comforting, enlightening ray.

“O most blessed Light Divine,
Shine within these hearts of Thine,
And our inmost being fill.
Where Thou art not, man hath nought,
Nothing good in deed or thought,
Nothing free from taint of ill.”

Very various and manifold are the agencies the

Spirit employs. Very frequently it is a season of suffering or sorrow. The soul is brought low in the valley of humiliation. Comforts are removed and troubles increase. Then heavenly things become more real. God is known more fully as a sure Refuge. The promises stand out with clearer brightness. As the late Dean Champneys put it, the railway light is only seen as you enter the dark tunnel ; so in the dark moments of adversity the bright lamp of promise shines out with double glory. Never forget, Christian, that there are two promises which go side by side along the road to Zion. One is, "*In the world ye shall have tribulation*," and the other, "*In Me ye might have peace*" (John xvi. 31). And the Holy Spirit very frequently uses the first to bring the second. It is by the teachings of sorrow that a deeper and surer peace is wrought in the soul.

No less does the Holy Spirit use the Word of God as a great instrument of sanctification. Our Lord's prayer is being constantly fulfilled. "Sanctify them through Thy truth ; Thy word is truth" (John xvii. 17). Every line of Holy Scripture teems with warning, promise, doctrine, or example that has a sanctifying tendency when it is received in meekness and obedience. There is not a single passage bearing on the person, offices, or character of Christ, but has

been used by the Spirit to draw souls closer to Him, and so detach them from the world. There is not a precept but has been employed by the Spirit to quicken some Christian in the way of God's commandments. There is not a privilege revealed as the portion of God's children but has been an instrument for encouraging some of God's saints in running the heavenly race. There is not a view of God's holiness or justice or truth but has been useful in implanting or nourishing in some soul a godly fear which has been a wholesome restraint in the hour of temptation. Therefore, in the cultivation of holiness, let the quiet, meditative study of Scripture hold a high place. Consider it as one of Christ's pasture-fields, to which He would daily lead you, and there make you to taste afresh the sweetness of His grace. And give time for reading and comparison of Scripture with Scripture. And take in the truth till it reaches the very depth of your heart. Do not leave the passage you have taken until you have found some kindling of love, some thought to strengthen your faith, some reminder of a neglected duty, some aspiration of a holier walk.

A few of the practical details of a holy life may be named as requiring continual watchfulness.

The careful use of time touches every part of the Christian life. A beautiful illustration has been

given of this:¹ "The hours are like a chain of little golden vessels passing before you day and night. You cannot arrest their progress. You can put something into each as it passes. You can put in a good thought or word or deed, or a bad thought or word or deed. Or you can let it go empty. Once past you cannot recall it. Twenty-four vessels every day! Eight of them pass while we are asleep. One-third of them empty. Alas! how many more through our negligence and sloth every day pass empty! Alas for the contents of many of them! Golden vessels filled with wood, hay, stubble! Some of them filled with what is worse than worthless, evil thoughts and words and deeds. But they pass on continually till they come before the throne of God. And there account is taken of their contents. Of how many are you satisfied that God should note their contents?"

The conscience must be kept tender and sensitive. When the soul is in a healthy condition, the conscience will ever be mindful of the approach of sin, and shrink from it in whatever form it may present itself. It may come under the guise of an angel. It may profess a good end, or plead the example of some saint of God. It may hide its deformity or its

¹ From "Perfecting Holiness."—CUTTS, S.P.C.K.

danger by calling itself only a natural infirmity ; but the eagle eye of the Spirit-taught Christian will discern the cloven foot, will mark the covert disobedience, the evil from which Christ would have turned away, and will abhor it and detest it as an abominable thing which God hates. You must be in sympathy with God in detecting hidden forms of evil, in trying the things that differ, in that wise and godly fear that will always refuse the persuasion to act or speak amiss, however it may be disguised.

“Ah, give me, Lord, the tender heart
That trembles at the approach of sin!
A godly fear of sin impart,
Implant and root it deep within,
That I may fear Thy gracious power,
And never dare to offend Thee more.”

The will must be yielded up entirely to God. The chiefest sin of man is to set up his will against God's will, and to go on his way quite irrespective of that which God has commanded. But in conversion the will is given up to God. “Teach me to do Thy will,” is the believer's prayer. “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” is the genuine expression of the heart renewed by the Spirit. And the more this purpose is followed out, the more holy will the Christian be. And is it not far the best to seek to have

this carried out at all times? What is our will when rebelling against God, but the source of endless trouble and remorse? Is not God's will the truest will, the best will, the will that leads to peace and rest, as well as holiness and heaven? When there comes a great temptation to follow our own way through a prospect of gain or passing pleasure, if we hearken to the same, does it not invariably bring its own bitter punishment after it? And if we deny self, and do that which we know to be right, have we not found again and again a great reward? Has not, perchance, the comfort or blessing we desired become our own without the sting of a guilty conscience, which would have marred all its enjoyment?

And in times of sorrow and bereavement and disappointment, when we have accepted the trial in meekness as from God's hand, and have humbled ourselves under the blow at His footstool, has there not always come something of that heavenly calm which took from the trial more than half its bitterness? Would that we could always seek to have our crooked wills made after the straight and all-wise will of God! Would that we could ever be satisfied that all things mysterious now will prove to God's children the right path to the kingdom! Would that we could ever say, "Thy will be done," and cling to Jesus in our grief!

"On earth below, in heaven above,
There is no rest but in His love ;
All else must fail the weary heart,
But His is peace that won't depart."

To help us to endure cheerfully whatever may happen to us, let us be firmly persuaded that the hand of Infinite Love is ordering and directing all things for our profit.

Some time ago two ladies were in a pony carriage, when the reins happened to fall, and the pony started off. It marvellously escaped from any serious danger, turning safely two sharp corners, and finally stopping at a door where it had often previously stood. In the midst of the apparent danger one lady said to the other, "*He* holds the reins." And so it proved, for they were safely brought through the hour of peril.

Christian, remember this, "*He* holds the reins." He who made all things and preservest all ; He whose hand is mighty to save ; He who knows the end from the beginning ; He who wisely ordereth every footprint, *He* holds the reins, and will guide all events and circumstances to our highest and eternal welfare.

Another important element in a holy life is the *exercise of control over spirit and temper*. Not seldom the temper is like a fiery steed that will rush heed-

lessly into the fray, or over the side of a precipice. If you wish to follow Christ, you must put on the curb, and know how to keep in check all haste and passion and irritability. A single outburst of temper may do yourself and others an amount of injury that weeks and months may scarcely undo. To avoid this evil you must learn to live always in the presence of God. The holy calm of nearness to God is the very best preservative from yielding to an unruly spirit. His eye is upon you ; His ear is open to you ; His heart is your pillow. "How can I willingly break the charm of this happy fellowship and bring dishonour upon His name ?" Such will be the thought of the Christian that thus lives in the consciousness of a Father's presence and love.

But we must not let the mention of these details of Christian holiness lead us to imagine that it consists of various independent duties or virtues. There is a unity in the Christian life. The apostle prays that "the spirit and soul and body may be preserved entire." It is all one great principle and life. Touch one part and you injure the whole. Your life is not to be as a patched coat, partly old and partly new. It is not to be as a vine, with some branches living and some dead, or as a human body maimed by accident or weakened by disease. Nay, the whole must be one. The new garment, the fair raiment of

conformity to the will of God, must not be marred by the remnants of any wilful disobedience. Every part of the soul is to be instinct with the life of the Spirit. Every virtue and grace is to find its due manifestation in your daily walk.

And what is this principle and life? It is neither more nor less than this—Christ taking possession of the whole man—Christ exercising supreme dominion over the conscience, the will, the affections, the temper, the words and actions of every day. It is Christ living over again in your soul His own life in the world. It is Christ speaking through your life, thinking through your thoughts, working through your hands, going hither and thither in the world by your feet, and thus through you manifesting Himself to those around you.

Oh, what a high and noble life this is! Would that Christian people were more perpetually living it out, and thus showing the mighty power of Christ to sanctify and save!

And by what means may it be so? There is one point I have not yet named, but which answers this question. It is in proportion to a Christian's faith he can thus live.

By faith you must be sanctified as well as justified. By faith it is that Christ must ever dwell in your heart, and thus influence your whole life.

But you must be careful here. You must be sanctified by faith, but by faith in what? There are some who seem to think they must have faith *in purified self*. They mistake the meaning of Scripture, and speak of the possession of a sinless heart, or of having been able to live so long without sin. They put their *attainments* forth, as if they must believe that God has already cleansed their nature from all defilement, instead of regarding the final aim of God's dealings with them, that now self and the evil principle within should be daily mortified and kept under, and then when Christ appears, they should be like Him, for they shall see Him as He is.

To myself any view of the kind seems a most dangerous and deadly error. It must lead to spiritual pride. It must lead to self-glorying. It must hinder that daily confession of sin and humiliation before God which is so precious in His sight.

Very striking was the way in which a young lady who had held these views very strongly repudiated them on her death-bed. Again and again before her death with the utmost emphasis she repeated the words of St. John, "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John i.) And so it is. The more we see of God and His law and His holiness, the more shall we discover the treachery, the remaining deadness, coldness, un-

belief, and worldliness of our own nature. The more shall we see how far we come below the standard of our Lord's life. The more shall we discern in our wandering thoughts when at prayer, in our unwillingness to bear the cross, in our many failures and shortcomings, that from first to last we can only hope to be saved as sinners washed in the blood of Christ, and having no righteousness or perfection of any kind except as we stand in Him, the holy and the sinless Redeemer.

Nevertheless, the great truth of sanctification by faith is not to be withheld because sometimes it is perverted and mistaken. You must never glory in self, but you must always glory in Christ, for power as well as for pardon and peace. You must continually, by the aid of the Spirit, stir up your faith in Christ and expect Him to do great things for you. You must look to Him to keep *the serpent in you* chained and harmless. You must look to Him day by day to keep you from the least wilful outbreak of your own evil heart. You must look to Him to strengthen and raise up in you the new man, and to make every grace vigorous and active. You must look to Him for more light to know in everything what is the will of God, and then for the will and the power to act in accordance with it. If you wish to be holy, live upon Christ, lean upon Christ perpet-

ually. Make Him the first to whom you go in the morning and the last to whom you speak at night.

Remember His presence as being always near you. Remember His love as being ever the same. Remember Him as your Shepherd, your Advocate, your Guardian and your Guide. Remember His faithful promises and rest upon them. Remember His loving care and depend upon it. Remembering Jesus, trusting in Jesus, glorying in Jesus, whilst ever remembering your own exceeding unworthiness and sinfulness, you will grow in grace and be preserved without blame until He comes.

The last point I would urge is this: Nothing is more helpful in holy living than *a vivid and constant recollection that Christ will soon return*. It is not needful that you should be able clearly to see the sequence of events at His appearing. You may have many difficulties about the millennium and the personal reign of Christ on earth; but let one thought stand out clearly before you, *Christ is returning in His glory, and I shall see Him and shall be like Him and with Him for ever*.

Cherish this hope amidst life's troubles and temptations. Let your soul be animated by the inspiring conviction that amidst all the confusion and evil and error that abound, Christ will come and take the

kingdom and put an end to all the sin under which the world groans.

Be assured that to every true Christian the brightness and gladness of that day will be altogether beyond his utmost thoughts. Be assured that on that day you will see the numberless answers to your prayers as you have never seen them here, and that all that has been dark and sorrowful and trying, will be manifested as amongst the all things that work together for your good.

“ Oh quickly come, Great King of all,
Reign all around us and within ;
Let sin no more our souls enthral,
Let pain and sorrow die with sin :
Oh quickly come, for grief and pain
Can never cloud Thy glorious reign.”

V.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF GIVING.

“Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”—Acts xx. 35.

THESE words of Christ come to us in a remarkable way that seems to give them double force.

Suppose you had had a father whose wise and loving counsels had saved you from many mistakes and had influenced for good your whole life. But he dies, and you miss exceedingly the voice which has so often directed and comforted you. Years pass away, and one day you come across a friend who had known your father well. In the course of conversation he repeats a striking and instructive remark of your father which you had never heard before. Would it not be likely to leave a very strong impression on your mind? Would it not take hold of you in a way that you would never forget?

Now was it not something like this in the case of the words of the Lord Jesus to which I am referring? They are not given to us in any of the Gospels. We

have no account of their having been heard or enforced until Paul, speaking to the elders of Ephesus about seven-and-twenty years after our Lord's death, presses them upon their conscience as a motive for self-denial and liberality.

Nor does he speak of them without telling of the effect they had had upon himself. "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these *hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.* I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (verses 33-35).

It is a word worthy of our frequent meditation. It is a word calculated to raise the Christian character, and to assist greatly a follower of Christ in imitating the Master whom he loves.

It is a very precious word. You have often recalled such words of Christ as tell of His saving grace and mercy. "I am the Good Shepherd." "I am the way, the truth, and the life." "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

But this word in its place will be no less helpful to you than the most comforting of these. It will be a means of bringing no small benefit to others, but the most of all to yourself. Especially at this Advent

season should we dwell on the importance of this as of every other talent with which we are commanded to trade. If we would hear at Christ's appearing the word of commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant," we must carefully mark every opportunity for giving in His name, and not be slack to avail ourselves of it.

"It is more blessed to give than to receive." What a marvellous contrast here to the spirit of the world, and to the lives of many who profess to belong to Christ! "*Get what you can and keep what you get,*" seems to be the creed of many. *Strain every nerve to add house to house, or thousand to thousand, and then be very careful what you give. Only give that which is absolutely needful, that you may not lose caste in the society or congregation to which you belong.*

Ah, and there are many who are only too glad if they can find any excuse why they should not give. If only they can find some flaw in a certain society, or some defect in a good work, then they are quite content to refuse even the smallest sum. Alas for such shrivelled souls! not like the flowing river, giving freely as it receives, but like the stagnant pool whose waters grow more fetid day by day, rather spreading foul vapours and disease than bringing blessing to those around.

But why is it so blessed to give—more blessed to

give than to receive? *Because it is like our Father in heaven.* To be like God is often set before us as our duty and privilege. "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." "Be ye followers (or imitators) of God, as dear children."

And is there anything which more clearly than this marks the dealings of God with man? He is the great Giver. He is always giving. From eternity He has been giving. He is giving at this moment. He will ever give. He gives in heaven above. He gives on earth beneath. From ages past He has never ceased to give for one single moment.

"Every good gift and every perfect is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights" (James i. 17).

"Thou openest Thy hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing" (Ps. cxlv. 16). "He giveth to all life and breath and all things" (Acts xvii. 25). He giveth in His Providence all things needful to supply the wants of the vast population of our world. He giveth His sun to bring to us warmth and light and fruitfulness. He giveth His wide ocean to be a highway from nation to nation, and its treasures of fish to supply the necessities of multitudes. Every drop of rain, every grain of corn, every specimen of gathered fruit, every fowl of the air, every flock of sheep, every herd of oxen, all are His merciful gifts to the children of men.

But beyond all, look at the gifts of His grace. He giveth His own blessed Word of Truth, a very mine of wealth to such as have learnt to value it aright. He giveth heaven's very best treasure, His well-beloved Son, to be a ransom for our sins. He giveth the grant of a free and full pardon through Christ. He giveth His blessed Spirit, the Comforter, to dwell in our hearts. He giveth the glorious privilege of adoption into His family. He giveth peace that passeth understanding. He giveth grace sufficient for each time of need. In short, "He giveth grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Ps. lxxxiv. 10).

No less may we learn God's joy in giving if we study the life of Christ. He came to reveal to us the Father, and in His own sojourn amongst us we can see more plainly than elsewhere the Father's delight in bestowing richest benefits upon the children of men.

For Christ was poor Himself, yet was He ever giving. He knew what it was to be homeless, to be hungry; to work and to live as a poor man for thirty years; and at last His very raiment was taken from Him, and He was laid in another's tomb.

Yet was He ever giving. What gifts of tender sympathy and loving service did He yield whilst at work at the carpenter's bench at Nazareth! Then look at

His innumerable gifts during His three years' ministry! He gave wine at the marriage feast, in token of the new wine of His kingdom that He should ever be giving. He gave food to the five thousand and to the seven thousand. He gave calm and peace to His disciples in the storm. He gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb. He gave health to multitudes who were sick. He gave life to those who were dead. He gave back Lazarus to the sorrowing sisters, and the little daughter to the bereaved father, and the only son to the widowed mother. He gave a blessing to the little children, and consolation to the burdened sons and daughters of grief. He gave a kingdom and a place in Paradise to the dying thief. And last of all, He gave up Himself, every member of His sacred body, every drop of His precious blood, for a world that hated and rejected Him. In all this Christ showed forth the Father. He taught us how the Father ever loves to give.

Ah, why do men cherish such wrong thoughts of God? Why do men regard Him as a cruel exactor, instead of a most bountiful giver? Why do they regard Him as a Pharaoh—asking too much of them, ready to demand bricks without giving straw—instead of a Joseph, delighting to supply the cry of the hungry and the famishing?

Thus we see the true blessedness of giving. It is like our Father in heaven. It is like the Lord Jesus. It is to manifest that we have something of His Spirit. It is to follow in His footsteps and to do His will.

But more than this. There is a *felt joy* in cheerful giving. Where love is ruling in the heart, a gift brings oftentimes fresh gladness and pleasure to the giver. Who has not known the pleasure of bringing a gift to a dear child or parent or friend? And if our gifts are only bestowed out of love—out of love to God, out of love to the Saviour, out of love to man—every gift is an addition to the Christian's joy.

There is an example of this in 1 Chron. xxix. There was great liberality manifested in preparation for the building of the temple. David prepared with all his might gold and silver and precious stones. And the chief of the fathers and the princes and the captains no less freely and willingly offered abundantly. Gold, silver, brass, precious stones were poured in abundantly. Then notice the outburst of joy (verse 9), “The people rejoiced because they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy.”

Then arose a magnificent song of grateful praise for all the goodness that the Lord had shown to Israel (verses 10-20).

Be assured that the reflex benefits of cheerful, liberal bounty are by no means small. It becomes a great means of grace. It feeds and nourishes the spiritual life. It counteracts the terrible spirit of selfishness which is so great an enemy to our progress. It draws forth our sympathy and interest in the welfare of others, and in the various good works to which we contribute. It brings a man into closer connection with God's most faithful servants, and in many other ways strengthens the Christian in doing the will of God.

Nor must we forget a very remarkable word of Christ bearing on this point. He tells us of two ways by which we look for gifts from above. One is *by prayer*. "Ask and it shall be given unto you" (Matt. vii. 7). The other is *by giving*. "Give, and it shall be given unto you; *good measure, pressed* down, and *shaken together*, and *running over*, shall men give unto your bosom" (Luke vi. 38). How God loves to repay those who love to give! "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, yet it tendeth to poverty" (Prov. xi. 24).

Nor amongst the various blessings that rest on him who giveth should we omit the favour and acceptance which every true gift draws forth from Christ.

We cannot mistake this point. Take one of Christ's great "whosoever." We have not a few "whosoever" of invitation and encouragement to sinners to come to Him; but here is a "whosoever" of recompense to quicken His servants in giving in His name: "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward" (Matt. x. 42). By the side of this promise I should like to place two examples given in the gospel story. There seems to me a very precious thought in joining them together. Both were women. But one was comparatively rich, and one was poor. So one gave her offering, worth about nine pounds in our money, and the other gave about three farthings. But Christ greatly commended both. Of Mary, who brought the box of precious ointment and poured it upon His head, He declared that she "had wrought a good work on Him," and that wheresoever the gospel was preached her deed should be proclaimed (Mark xiv. 1-9).

Of the widow who brought her two mites, Christ spoke as giving more than all the rich who cast in of their abundance (Mark xii. 41-44).

Wherever there is a willing spirit and a loving heart, Christ accepts and rewards the gift. It may

be the smallest coin we have cast into a missionary box by a poor child. It may be a cheque for a thousand pounds given to some agency for the spread of His gospel, by one who loves to act as the Lord's steward. But He accepts and rewards and blesses the gift. Nothing is given in vain. And when we see the King face to face, we shall know how precious has been everything done or given for His name's sake.

"It is more blessed to give than to receive." But how can I realise this? How can I live in the power of this truth? How can I be something like the Master, to the utmost of my power delighting to give wheresoever I have the opportunity?

Remember *there is a divine order in the various duties we have to perform.* So is it in this matter of giving. And the order is found in these other words of Christ: "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. x. 8). If you would be a glad, joyful giver, you must first be a glad, hearty receiver. There is a blessedness in receiving as well as in giving. First, you must come, if you have never yet done so, to ask and to receive of Christ the rich mercy and grace He delights to give. Open thy mouth wide and He will fill it. As a free gift for Christ's sake God offers thee full forgiveness, a new heart, the grace of repentance, the comfort

and power of the Holy Ghost, and life everlasting. Will you not accept these benefits trustfully, thankfully, joyfully? What does a free gift need but an empty hand to receive it? And what is this empty hand but the faith that owns its poverty and looks for everything to Christ? And is not salvation offered to us as a free gift? Look at the words of Paul (Rom. vi. 23): "The wages of sin is death: but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Revised Version).

If you want to know the blessedness of giving, you must begin with knowing the blessedness of receiving. Cast away all indifference and unbelief and doubt, and receive in humble faith all that God waits to give you. Seek to be filled with the fulness which is in Christ. Get your little cistern to overflow with the living water. Get your treasury enriched exceedingly from the unsearchable riches of Christ. Get your cottage filled with the sunshine of God's loving-kindness. Then you will be prepared to give, because you will have the spirit of your Master guiding you. You will have Christ dwelling in you and with you, and He will prompt you to give as He gave. I do not believe it is possible for the soul of man to be possessed of the love of God, and to have the blessed Spirit abiding with him in power, and to keep the heart shut and the hand shut to the

cry of distress and to the needs of the Church of Christ.

Another point is most important. You must not limit the idea of giving. Perhaps in God's sight many of the greatest givers may be those who scarcely ever handle a sovereign. The bountiful giver is the one who has the spirit of giving. And if such a one has not gold and silver, he may yet give that which is still more precious. He may give true heart-sympathy in times of trouble; he may give prayers and tears, and looks and words of kindness; he may give time to assist another who is oppressed with overwork. As Christ was always giving though always poor, so he in whom Christ dwells will be ever acting in the same way. He will have the eye to discern another's sorrow, and a willingness to bear the burden with him. He will use his influence to obtain from others for a needed cause that which he is unable to give himself. You remember the words of Peter to the lame man at the beautiful gate of the Temple: "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee" (Acts iii. 6).

There is many a humble Christian who may speak in the same way. Peter gave through Christ far more than silver and gold could have purchased when he restored the man to vigour and health. And so the

follower of Christ now may be the channel of bestowing gifts of spiritual consolation and help which shall never pass away.

A very useful illustration of gifts more precious than money has lately been given in connection with the visit of the American evangelists to London. Their work seems to have been blessed very largely, and this to a great extent through the zeal of God's servants in helping them. And this in very various ways. Money was needed and freely given. £16,000 was raised without any one being asked for a single donation. But far better than money was given no less willingly. Young men came up from the university and gave their time and influence to carry on the work. About a hundred persons followed from place to place, taking lodgings at their own cost, to work night and day and bring in the people to the Saviour. Then titled ladies and others moving in very high position came down and visited and worked in the slums, nursing the babies whilst the mothers went to the meetings, opening a crêche, and being content to feed and watch over these little ones for an hour or two till the service was over. Another gift of service has been named perhaps still more remarkable. The heir to one of the greatest fortunes in London stood outside the door during the whole meeting, holding a cabman's horse

that the cabman might be able to remain during the service which was going on.

Very precious in God's sight are such deeds of practical self-denial, and it may be they will bear fruit such as would arise from no gift of silver and gold.

But as money is so vast a responsibility, and may be so large a talent for service, it may be well to say a few words upon the use of it. A few practical hints are all that I will add.

Never consent to be limited and kept back by the standard of giving that you find either in the Church or in the world. In the sight of the urgent needs of multitudes both at home and abroad, both in temporal and spiritual matters, nothing is more painful than the driplets which find their way into the Lord's treasury. Men never hesitate to give hundreds and thousands in the course of the year for some favourite indulgence, for entertaining friends, for some particular specimens of art, and yet for a great and good work scarcely a five-pound note or a guinea is to be obtained. We must leave all this behind. If we really believe in the blessedness of giving, we must not give the conventional guinea, but double and treble it. We must ask ourselves *how little* we can manage to spend on self, and *how much* we can contrive to spend for others and for the

work of God. We must be willing unsparingly to cut off needless luxuries in dress, in food, in adorning our homes, and then delight to have it for higher purposes. We must imitate Miss Havergal, who was so glad for the first time to have any large sums of money of her own that she might send it to our noble Church Missionary Society and kindred agencies.

We must exercise forethought to enable us to give it more freely. Could not many who have a fixed income, or who can reckon somewhere about what their income will be, give a fair proportion, such as a tenth, or even more, for good works? When by this means money is reserved, it becomes so easy and pleasant to give a helpful gift when a matter of necessity is brought before you.

If young persons who are beginning life would enter upon it in this spirit, I believe God would bless and prosper them the more, and in the course of a few years they would do an incalculable amount of good in Christ's Church.

The weekly offertory which is now so widely practised affords another opportunity for systematic giving. Unless you are reduced to very great straits, never pass the plate or bag without contributing something, however small. Think how much a liberal, free heart will suggest for each Sunday, and then be

prepared, on special occasions, when the object commends itself more particularly to your sympathy, to give twice as much as your ordinary gift. See if you cannot afford at least sixpence or a shilling on each occasion, but if it be only a threepenny or a penny piece, let it be always ready, and then in the course of the year you will bestow very substantial help on many a good cause.

Then do not forget the use of *thank-offerings*. It is a good and pleasant thing to be thankful, and never more so than when thankfulness stirs you up to a fresh gift. When some unlooked-for sum of money comes in; when you yourself, or one of your household, is restored to health; when a year has passed without a doctor's bill; when a little one is born to bring a fresh beam of sunshine into your house; when some difficulty or temptation has been removed, or a special prayer answered; when you have found fresh comfort and peace in God's service; when one you have often prayed for has been led to Jesus,—in these and in other seasons for deep gratitude, let your gratitude take a practical form and give a proof of it by dropping a half-sovereign into your missionary box, or in your case, it may be, a sixpence, or even less, will be no slight token of a thankful heart.

But whatever you give, give it with cheerful, un-

grudging spirit. Thank the Lord that all you have is from Him. Thank Him that He grants you the privilege of giving. Thank Him that He accepts your gift, and will remember it at His coming. Prove for yourself the true saying of Christ, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*"

"We lose what on ourselves we spend ;
We have as treasure without end
Whatever, Lord, to Thee we lend,
Who givest all.

Whatever, Lord, we lend to Thee
Repaid a thousand-fold will be ;
Then gladly will we give to Thee
Who givest all.

To Thee, from whom we all derive
Our life, our gifts, our power to give,
Oh may we ever with Thee live,
Giver of all."

VI.

THE GOLDEN INVITATION.

“Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”—MATT. xi. 28.

I SEE a wide and troubled sea. Many a shipwrecked sailor or passenger is struggling with the angry billows. Many a little barque is tossed hither and thither to the peril of those on board.

But moving up and down that stormy deep I see a ship, safe and roomy. No sea can overwhelm her. No leak or rotten timber within endanger the peace of those who sail in her. On her bow I see her name, “Immanuel,” “Friend of Sinners.” And from her again and again a voice is heard, so gentle as to attract a little child, and so mighty that it reaches o'er the vast expanse of that storm-tossed ocean.

“Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”

Ah, blessed voice to life's weary voyagers! Blessed message of peace to those who amidst temptations and troubles are toiling hard to reach the harbour!

And it is a word not unsuited to Advent. For Advent tells of the Coming One. It tells of Him who once came in lowliness to save the lost, and who will come in majesty and glory to receive His people and to judge the world.

But there needs another coming. "Thy King cometh unto thee." But thou also must come to thy King. He cometh in grace to lift thee up to His kingdom, but thou must come in faith to be partaker of that kingdom. So here is the call of love. Here is the invitation of a world-wide Redeemer.

But first notice what a testimony we have here to the Divine Sonship of the Lord Jesus. Nothing so convinces us of the Divinity of Christ as the evidences that underlie His whole ministry ; and here is one. Imagine for a moment Isaiah or Jeremiah or Elijah, or any one of the prophets, or Peter or Paul or John, or any other of the twelve, uttering such words as these—"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

We see at once the impossibility of such a thing. How could these men, however great or good, probe the wounds of myriads of hearts, or know how to apply to each the healing balm ? How could these men pacify the conscience, and take off the heavy load, and cheer and comfort the inner spirit of man ?

But Christ can do it. He promises and He per-

forms. He has unloosed the chains and carried the heavy burden, and spoken peace to all who have truly come to Him. Hence He must be Divine. He must be Omniscient, Omnipresent, and Almighty. Only He who is "very God of very God" could speak or fulfil words of life and salvation such as these.

"*Come unto Me.*" How different is the attitude of man toward God, and of God toward man! Look at man—poor and needy, helpless and defiled by sin, a child of sorrow and an heir of death. Look at Jehovah—great, high, holy, in His majesty far, far exalted above human thought; and yet what do you find? *Man is evermore crying, "Depart from me; I desire not the knowledge of Thy ways."* Guilt in the conscience and the love of sin make men turn away from God, as a diseased eye turns from the light. They wish to forget God, and put from them all thought of His authority, or of His nearness and presence.

As the Gadarenes were troubled by the loss of their swine, and bade Christ depart from them, so does the natural heart echo their cry, and prefer its worldly lusts and pursuits to the rich blessing which Christ would bestow. Here is sin in its very essence, in its very deadliest form! Here is sin that is opposed more than all others to the first and great commandment.

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief *in departing from the living God*” (Heb. iii. 12).

But the voice of our merciful God is ever crying “Come!”. Be men never so vile or so full of enmity and indifference, the voice of God ever cries, *Come, come unto Me.*

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, *come ye to the waters*; yea, *come*, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa. lv. 1).

“*Come*, for all things are now ready” (Luke xiv.)

“If any man thirst, let him *come* to Me and drink” (John vii. 37).

“The Spirit and the Bride say, *Come*. And let him that heareth say, *Come*. And let him that is athirst *come*” (Rev. xxii. 17).

And so here, from the lips of man’s Redeemer calling to all the toiling and troubled children of men we have this word of love, “Come unto Me, . . . and I will give you rest.”

“Come unto Me!” Here is no mere formal, meaningless invitation. There is many an invitation given out of compliment, where there is neither the wish nor the expectation that it should be accepted—in fact, the person who makes it would be very much surprised if you took him at his word and went to spend a day or two under his roof.

But Christ's invitation is real and true. He yearns over all whom He invites to Himself and will give them a welcome beyond all that they could look for. For every word of Christ is the outflow of a tender, compassionate heart. He sees our great need and misery. He sees that we cannot do without His aid. And He desires to supply each want, to heal each wound, and to relieve each sorrow.

Then, too, the invitation of Christ is given with a hidden purpose of love which none can fully understand until they accept it.

You may perhaps remember the story of an incident in the life of the great American evangelist. He was invited on a certain occasion to meet some friends at a particular house. But a great surprise of liberal bounty and unlooked-for kindness was prepared for him. It was a house furnished as a gift to himself, and everything provided that could possibly add to his comfort. So is it with Christ and those who accept His invitation. He has gifts and proofs of kindness and tokens of affection which they could never have anticipated. Yes, and not once or twice, but throughout their course on earth, and throughout the long eternity before them, He will be still bestowing some new token of His grace and loving-kindness.

“Come unto Me!” He does not say, “Come unto Mary.” Is it not a marvellous dishonour to the Lord Jesus, that men should be taught that they can obtain more quickly what they need by going to His mother than by going straight to Him, according to this great invitation? If He had bidden me go to His mother I would have gone; but since it is otherwise, I will not turn away from the front door of the palace, where the King stands calling to me, to go to the back door, where I am told His mother shall plead for me.

Neither doth Christ say, “Come unto My priests.” He does tell us to hearken to the voice of His ministers. We may not despise or reject the message which they bring to us in His name. But He nowhere tells us that He has appointed a priestly order who have power to offer a propitiatory sacrifice or to receive confession of sins on His behalf. Had such been the case, we should have had something of a Christian book of Leviticus in place of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which points to the living and exalted Redeemer as the one only Priest, whose priesthood “passes not from Him to any other” (Heb. vii. 24), and who ever makes intercession for those who draw nigh through Him.

Yea, He saith, “Come unto *Me*,” and stay not first to go to any other. Come unto *Me*, for I have an

unfailing spring of compassion, and am able to save to the uttermost. Come unto Me, for I have more love for sinners than any child of man ever possessed. Come unto Me, for I am Shepherd, Physician, Friend, Redeemer and High Priest and King in one, and each office I will exercise on thy behalf. Come unto Me, for I have ever an ear attentive to the cry of the needy and the perishing and the sorrowful. Come unto Me, for I have never yet cast away one who has come, and I never will. A sinner you may be beyond all sinners in your own eyes—a blind sinner, a hard-hearted one, a tempted one, a backsliding one, but you need not fear; I can save, I will save and bless you evermore.

*"Come unto Me, my soul rejoice,
Whate'er thy burden be;
It is thine own Redeemer's voice
That speaks in love to thee."*

But perhaps the very word "Come" has a difficulty for you. Since Christ in His bodily form is far away at the right hand of God, you scarcely understand how you can at once come to Him.

Think of Bartimeus. He was blind and could not see Christ. Only he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. And he believed it. He believed too that He had a mighty power, even to open his eyes. So he cried. He cried in faith. He was

surrounded by some who would have had him hold his peace. But he only cried the more and the more earnestly, "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!" Thus he prevailed. Christ called him and approved his faith, and gave him the blessing which he sought.

Precisely thus may you come also. Bartimeus could not see Christ, and you cannot. But he heard that Christ was near, and He is no less near to you—so near that by virtue of His divine nature, a thought, a sigh, a look, reaches His heart. Believing this, you have but to offer the cry of faith. He cannot but hear it. And though, like Bartimeus, you may have hindrances, voices of doubt and fear within and without, bidding you desist, yet give no heed to them. Only persevere. Only more fully trust His mercy and grace. Only continue to seek Him in prayer. And sooner shall He forsake His place at God's right hand than put to shame the soul that thus flees to Him.

But another difficulty comes in your way. You are afraid you are not one whom Christ invites. You wish to come, and would come; but Christ calls the weary and the heavy-laden, and you fear you are scarcely numbered amongst them. You have not laboured or toiled enough. You have not felt enough the burden of your sins. So perhaps you think you

may not be welcome to Him who comes to seek and to save the lost.

But you are to look at these words in another light than this. All are invited, but some specially, lest they should think themselves excluded. Christ had been uttering terrible woes against Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum for their hardness and impenitence, but not the worst to be found in one of these cities would have been shut out by Christ if only he had come.

But there are some who are so troubled and hopeless and despairing, that to them help and salvation seem utterly impossible. Just as Israel would scarce listen to Moses because of anguish and cruel bondage. They were so full of toil and weariness, and so oppressed with heavy burdens, that they could listen to no word of comfort. Thus is it with some now. They have been labouring and striving in vain to overcome sin and to live a life of obedience. They often carry with them a secret load of unworthiness, of wrongdoing, which weighs heavily upon them. Other griefs and burdens likewise press them down, and so they imagine there is no help and salvation to be found. To such Christ comes with words of double encouragement. *Whilst all are welcome, you have special claim to My care. You above all shall be the objects of My grace. Cast at My feet thy burden,*

and I will carry it. Thy toilsome labour I will relieve, for my service is perfect freedom. Only leave Thyself and all with Me, and I will do all thou canst desire.

“Come unto Me, . . . and I will give you rest.”

A lady once gave a bunch of flowers to an invalid. They were a few very beautifully marked pansies. “Heart’s ease, heart’s ease,” said the poor woman. “Thank God, this I have enjoyed for years.”

Yes, Jesus does give this to those who come to Him. He gives true rest of spirit, the calm peace of mind which none else can ever bestow.

He gives rest from the consciousness of guilt and separation from God.

A conscience sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, a heart that can see all sin laid upon the Great Sacrifice, and that can draw nigh to God with no veil between, a firm persuasion that the debt is paid to the last farthing, and that God has accepted the payment made by my Surety instead of myself. This it is which brings rest to the soul.

And with this comes the rest brought to the soul by the felt nearness and presence of Christ. When Christ becomes thy Saviour, He also becomes thy friend and companion, the sharer of all thy sorrow, and His ear the repository of all thy cares. And

this brings constant peace the more we abide in
Him.

“Jesus, we rest in Thee,
In Thee ourselves we hide :
Laden with guilt and misery,
Where can we rest beside ?
'Tis on Thy meek and lowly breast
Our weary souls alone can rest.”

VII.

THE YOKE OF CHRIST.

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me ; for I am meek and lowly of heart : and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”—MATT. xii. 29, 30.

THE thoughts of Christ moved constantly in the atmosphere of the Old Testament Scriptures. In every one of His discourses we find proofs of this. Even when no scripture is directly referred to, a careful study of the passage will often make it plain that some prophecy or narrative was before our Lord's mind. I cannot but think that such was the case here, when He spoke of “the easy yoke and the light burden.”

You may remember words very different to these. A young monarch was about to take the throne. The later days of his father's kingdom had been marked by grievous idolatry and also by cruel oppression of his subjects. So the people earnestly desired that the young king should rule with a gentler sway.

So Jeroboam and all the congregation came to Rehoboam and spake to him, saying, "Thy father made our yoke grievous; make now therefore the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee" (1 Kings xii. 4).

But pride and self-will carried the day. The old men around him gave good counsel that he should speak good words to the people and so win them to serve him. But he refused their counsel and followed that of the young men. So he spoke roughly to them. "My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke; my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions" (verse 4). So they fled from and forsook him. They cast off his yoke and joined themselves to Jeroboam, who established his kingdom over the ten tribes.

Here was the son of a mighty king, Solomon, by rough words alienating his subjects and driving them into rebellion. What a contrast have we in the Lord Jesus, the Son of the Most High, who gently draws to Himself the hearts of His people by the cords of tender love! What a contrast have we in the rough, proud words of young Rehoboam, threatening the heavy yoke and the increased burden, yea, and scorpions for whips, to the easy yoke and light burden of the One who is meek and lowly in heart! And if

the words of Rehoboam drove away the people, that they were glad to serve another as a way of escape from his authority, shall not the words of the Lord Jesus attract us and fix our wavering spirits so that it shall be our joy and delight to render unswerving loyalty to our King?

Yea, Lord, Thou shalt be my Lord, my King, the One Monarch of my heart, the One Director of my life! I will take Thy yoke, yea, I will glory in it. I shall find it an easy one, even "perfect freedom." More than this, I will command Thy yoke wheresoever I can, that multitudes may learn to cast off the yoke of evil and follow with me in that blessed service, "whose ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

"How blessed, from the bonds of sin
And earthly fetters free,
In singleness of heart and aim
Thy servant, Lord, to be!
The hardest toil to undertake
With joy at Thy command,
The meanest office to receive
With meekness at Thy hand!"

"Come unto Me, . . . and I will give you rest" (verse 28).

"Take My yoke upon you, . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (verse 29).

Mark the order of these words. There is a uni-

versal obligation to serve Christ ; but if there is to be success and comfort in doing this, we must observe the Divine order. Some begin with ver. 29 and utterly fail. They have been living a life of sin or indifference, and they try at once to take up the yoke of Jesus, and find it an intolerable burden. They do not begin aright. They attempt the performance of duties without having either the right motive or the due strength to fulfil them. So after a time they fall back, and imagine that the service of Christ is altogether impossible.

But begin with verse 28. Begin with faith, and then happy obedience will naturally follow. Begin with bringing your burden of guilt and wrongdoing to the Lord Jesus, trusting in His promise, in His precious blood, in His power and willingness to save. Look to Him for the rest of pardon, of acceptance, of a Father's loving favour. Then go forward. Show forth the love that begins to inspire your breast. Embrace gladly the yoke of service, and surrender yourself to the Lord without reserve. So will the rest you have found become deep and lasting. It shall not only be given, but found. "*Ye shall find rest unto your souls.*"

"Take My yoke upon you." I love to notice here the outspoken faithfulness of Christ. He tells us plainly there is a yoke to be taken up and a burden

to be carried. We are not to rest in coming to Him and trusting in Him for pardon, but we must go forward to obey and work and do His will.

The same fidelity we see in other sayings of Christ. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. vii. 12).

"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke ix. 23).

"Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke xiv. 33).

Such words as these strengthen our faith in Christ. He hides nothing from us. He points out the difficulties we may look for and the losses for which we must be prepared. Yet in His mercy He shows that the gain far outweighs the loss. His presence and favour make every cross to be light, and every sorrow the inlet of some counterbalancing joy and consolation.

What a contrast to the life of a Christian is that of one who casts away faith in God and tries only to live in the present!

Here are the words of a working man who brooded on life's hardships until he utterly renounced all faith in God. He believed nothing. He rejected

even the idea of a Supreme Being. And when he gave his creed, it was a sorrowful contrast to the words by which Christ would draw us to His service. "My creed," said the man, "is to *live hard*, to *work hard*, and to *die hard*." And is there nothing better for man than this terrible creed of unbelief? Is there no hope to cheer us in dark and gloomy days?

Only lately I met with a few words with respect to one of England's princesses that may answer the question.

The late Princess Alice for a time yielded to the spirit of scepticism which is so prevalent in Germany. She had expressed her doubts as to the existence of God. She had taken a sort of philosophy which leaves no room for any true faith. But she found out how hollow it was. When she suddenly lost her little boy by a terrible fall, and other sorrows quickly followed, she found no rest for the sole of her foot away from the faith of Christ. Listen to her words: "The whole edifice of philosophical conclusions which I had built up for myself I find to have no foundation whatever: nothing of it is left: it has crumbled away like dust. What should we be, what would become of us, if we had no faith—if we did not believe there is a God that rules the world and each single one of us? I feel the necessity of prayer; I

love to sing hymns with my children: we have each one a favourite hymn." One who knew her intimately adds—"The Princess returned to the faith in which she was reared, and died in it a devout Christian."

Happy they who so learn of Christ! Happy they who refuse to follow the clever but baseless vision of an ungodly philosophy, and submit themselves to the yoke of the Great Teacher!

There is another illustration of this I should like to put beside the words of the Princess Alice which I have just quoted. A young lady in our own country had been turned aside from her early teaching by the pernicious articles which are often found in our magazine literature. She went from one error to another, and followed various leaders of new views until she was wandering in a maze of doubt and uncertainty. She had given up all that once she held, and had found nothing to replace it. Then came a long period of failing health. Her misery was extreme. She knew not what to believe or what to do. But a faithful friend wrote her a letter, and this became the first means of leading her to retrace her steps. Without assuming anything of the truth of those Scriptures which she had learnt to question, he asked her to accept Christ Himself as her teacher. He bade her leave the multitude of voices to which

she had been hearkening, and see if she could not find more certainty and sure guidance in the words of the Lord Jesus. So she did. She sought out all the words He has left us, and a divine light fell upon her heart. The shadows all fled away. And in the words of Him who "spoke as never man spoke," she found life and peace and the hope of glory.

Yes, this is the path of safety. Here we may rest.

"Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart."

Three things seem combined in these words.
Enter Christ's service. *Learn at Christ's footstool.*
Follow His holy example.

Enter Christ's service. Myriads of angels delight to do His will. All the hosts of heaven hasten to do His bidding. And shall I hold back? Shall one redeemed, pardoned, saved, and blessed of Him hesitate in accepting His yoke? Nay, every other yoke will I cast aside, the yoke of sin, the galling yoke of priestcraft, the fear of man, the self-will and selfishness that have hitherto borne sway far too much, that I may serve henceforth Christ and Christ only.

Learn at Christ's footstool. I must be careful here. I must not substitute any other voice for that of the Great Prophet. One word from the lips of Christ must weigh with me more than ten thousand words of other teachers. Popes, churches, councils,

preachers, books, traditions have erred and do err, and if I follow them I may forsake the doctrine of Christ. I may lawfully use all help and assistance in the right understanding of Divine truth ; but I must call no man master but Christ Himself, and on Him I must wait continually for the light and guidance of His Holy Spirit.

Follow His holy example. I must not only learn the secrets of divine truth from His Word, but I must learn the secret of a holy life by walking as He walked. “Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.” Amongst all lessons, none is better than this. I must copy His humility. I must remember His gentleness, His forbearance, His willingness to stoop even to the cross. I must cast to the winds all haughtiness and self-conceit, and be content to be nothing, if only He may be glorified. And where there is true humility, self-sacrifice, loving charity, purity of heart and life will not lag far behind. For Christ Himself dwells with the humble ; and where Christ and His Spirit abide, every Christian virtue will spring forth and grow.

Of all means of usefulness such holy living is the very greatest. Of all causes of unbelief and ungodliness, the lack of this godly consistency amongst professors is about the strongest.

One who had been an utter unbeliever, but had

returned to the faith of Christ, was asked why he had formerly held infidel views. "*Through reading Christians instead of reading the Scriptures,*" was his reply.

But why should "*reading Christians*" make a man an infidel? Was it not through "*reading Christians*" in the primitive times that men forsook their heathen idolatries and chose to follow the despised Nazarene? And may it not be so again? Is it not so in the case of many a child who through the godly life of a parent has in his own life manifested the same spirit? Oh that Christ might be seen in every one who bears His name! Oh that we might one and all so learn of Him that the outside world would see through us the mighty reality of His grace!

Let the Christian ever remember the strong encouragement which the Master gives to all who take His yoke.

It is a *yoke lined with love*. He who lays it on you is no hard man, no cruel tyrant, but the meek and lowly One, the Saviour, the Friend, the Brother, the Bridegroom of His people. In love He breaks the heavy yoke of the great adversary. In love He bids you take His yoke. In love He fits it to the neck of each who bears it. In love He stands by you and helps you to carry it, and gives daily grace for daily need.

From beginning to end *love* is the guiding prin-

ciple of the Christian's life. It is this that makes the service of Christ so bright and happy. Cultivate the love of Christ. Do everything out of love. And love will lighten every burden, and make you rejoice to do the will of God.

Nor forget that if there is a yoke, it is a yoke inseparably linked with soul-rest. "You shall find rest to your souls."

In this service you will find rest, because the more you fulfil it, the more will you be acting in harmony with the noblest powers and faculties of your nature.

You will be in harmony with an enlightened conscience, witnessing on your behalf that you are living the only life which will leave no regret behind.

You will be in harmony with the best of the children of men, with the holy angels, and with the spirits of just men made perfect.

You will be in harmony with the will of God, and walking in His favour and love. And to do the will of God must be rest, and leads on to the rest yet remaining.

"Thus may I serve Thee, gracious Lord,
Thus ever Thine alone,
My soul and body give to Thee,
The purchase Thou hast won.

Through evil and through good report,
Still keeping by Thy side,
By life or death in this poor flesh
May Christ be magnified."

VIII.

THE GREAT ACCOUNT.

“It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.”—*Heb.* ix. 27.

WHAT is after death? What is beyond that grave to which, one by one, we haste so swiftly?

There are those who scorn and despise the plain teaching of the Word of God, and then give their own guesses as to the future.

Some teach the dark, gloomy creed of annihilation. What is after death? “Nothing,” they would say. “Man finishes his course on earth, and then only lives in that which he has done here. Let men glory in the immortality of a good life, and be content to live only in the memory of mankind.”

Some imagine to themselves a life beyond the grave with elements of greatness and happiness to be shared by all alike. Man passes on naturally to the goal in the future, quite independent of what he may have been and done during his sojourn on earth. But such teachers deny or ignore two great factors in the question, the will of man’s Creator, and the

deformity of moral evil. Leave out these and you may feign to yourself some Elysian vision of bliss in a future state, but there is no substance or reality about it. A dying man could find no comfort in the thought of it, for it has no foundation on which to rest. Opinions like these are always changing. They are like the rising or receding tide. They are like the waxing or the waning moon.

One short sentence of the inspired Word is worth more than all human imaginings. And here is one. Whatever else may follow death, one thing is sure, the account which each must render before the judgment-seat of Christ. There is no escape from this. There is no discharge in this war. No man can elude the appointment of the Most High.

“It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.”

I bring three witnesses to confirm the truth of this. First, *reason* gives evidence with respect to it.

I have known a man growing rich on dishonest gains. He had his large mansion, and there he lived a long life in luxury and self-pleasing. He gloried in his wealth, but refused to regard the plainest calls to consider the wants of others. He could boast of his fifty pounds a week from freehold rents, and if ever a man did, he made a god of gold and silver. So he lived, and so, I fear, he died. Never would he hearken

to a word about death or righteousness or judgment to come. Until I die I shall never forget the hardness and impenitence and determined ungodliness of that wicked man.

I have known a Christian woman suffering a life-long martyrdom of want and anxiety and distressing burdens through the wickedness of a cruel husband. I have known her year after year struggling with adversity and patiently enduring all that came upon her. I have known her quietly take up her cross, commit her cares to the Lord, and hope still in Him in spite of all. And so I doubt not she will continue to do, until there come some lightening of her sorrow, or until she is taken from earth's tears and troubles.

The whole world is full of such contrasts. The oppressor and the oppressed; the high-handed evildoer and the meek and patient sufferer; the one who brings upon others untold miseries by the sins which he commits, and the one who reaps these bitter fruits, and yet whose life is light and righteousness and trust in God.

Surely reason tells of a reverse. There must come retribution if we believe there is a righteous God at all. Looking at the world as it is, no sounder conclusion can we draw than this, that a day will come that will set all things right, so that men shall say,

“Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily He is a God that judgeth in the earth” (Ps. lviii. 11).

Another witness I would call—*conscience*. It is a mighty power in the human soul. It will speak of sins long past when every other witness is dead and gone. It will reprove the sinner for evils that none but God hath seen. And what is this which we call conscience? Whence comes it? Who made it so stern a monitor, so that its voice cannot be silenced? Is it not *a little judgment-seat set up in the human breast by man's Creator?* Is it not fixed there as a witness for truth and righteousness and against all that is opposed to them? And is it not there, a part of man's moral nature, to proclaim clearly the judgment yet to come?

It is true that conscience may be dulled and deadened by long practice of sin, and by determined rejection of its warnings; but it is no less true that oftentimes *it has a resurrection* even now. Oftentimes sins committed half a century before come back afresh in the hour of danger or death. Assuredly in every case it will have a resurrection in the brightness of the great white throne, and will re-echo in no slumbering note the just verdict of the Almighty against the sins of a lifetime.

And that which *reason* and *conscience* proclaim as

most right and just, *revelation* proclaims as absolutely certain.

It comes down from the very earliest portion of Holy Scripture. We have Abraham asking the question, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” We have David declaring, “He cometh to judge the earth; with righteousness shall He judge the world, and the people with equity” (Ps. xcvi. 9). We have the testimony of Solomon, speaking to the young man of his life of self-pleasing, “Know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment” (Eccles. xi. 9).

Again, Solomon speaks to all of the duty of a holy and obedient fear of God, and gives this as a reason, —“God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil” (Eccles. xii. 14).

Again Daniel foretells in glowing words the awful day of account, when, in the presence of the Ancient of Days, “ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him, the judgment was set, and the books were opened” (Dan. vii. 10).

And when we come to the New Testament, with still greater fulness do we read of “that great day.” Christ tells of the King sitting on His throne, when all nations shall be gathered before Him, and He shall separate them one from another. St. Paul tells

us that God "hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained" (Acts xvii. 31).

And again, "We must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. v. 10), R. Version.

From St. Peter, St. Jude, and St. John do we gather the same truth, until at the very close of St. John's Revelation we see before us the day foretold in Daniel, when before the bar of Christ the dead, small and great, appear. The sea and death and Hades can no longer keep back their tenants. For according to their works must they appear to hear the sentence of their Judge (Rev. xx. 12, 15).

Thus full and plain is the testimony of Holy Scripture. It is repeated in many forms and by various writers. It is a distinct element in revelation, closely linked to every other truth you find there. You cannot ignore it. You cannot gainsay it. You cannot resolve it into some mere figurative description of God's righteous government. It is a revealed fact, that in due season shall have its exact fulfilment. As we have it in the Nicene Creed, "*He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead : whose kingdom shall have no end.*"

But what is that judgment? What is the meaning of that day? You are not to think of it as a day of assize amongst ourselves. It is not for the purpose of trial or examination. What a man is, what a man has been and done, is perfectly known to God, and we can have no doubt that at the hour of death, if not before, a man will know for a certainty what will be his condition hereafter. But the day of judgment is the *day of manifestation*. It is to be the great and final answer to all false judgments of every kind. It will bring to light whatever has been previously hidden or unknown. It will reverse all the groundless hopes and expectations of the ungodly. It will confirm all that has been revealed in the faithful records of the Word.

Hold fast by the idea of *manifestation*, and it will remove difficulties out of the way and will show the vast importance of the coming day.

It will be a *manifestation of the perfect equity of God's dealings with man*.

Men delight at the present day to cast contempt upon God's truth, and to lay it down that if the principles of Scripture are carried out, it must be at the cost of mercy and righteousness in God.

They imagine certain cases of human conduct, of crime, of accident, and the like, and then, making their own application of the rule of God's teaching,

they prove conclusively to their own satisfaction that such results could be nothing but the grossest injustice. But God will vindicate His own truth and the righteousness of His own laws. They will be carried out with a full view of man's inner life and of every circumstance connected with his condition on earth, and in all not one flaw will be found in the mercy; the truth, or the justice of the Most High. Not one stain will be seen on the great white throne. Whatever be the number of those who perish in their sin, whatever the terrible issue of ungodliness, however awful beyond all thought be that eternal death which men have brought upon themselves, it will then be seen as clear as day that the guilt and responsibility rest wholly with themselves. None will then speak of "the malevolence of the Deity." Why, if our Queen were to sign a death-warrant, yea, if she had to sign a thousand death-warrants in one day through the fearful prevalence of crime, who would ever for a moment impute to her anything but a desire at any cost to do her duty and to promote the moral wellbeing of her kingdom? And when God's ways are revealed to man more fully, it shall be owned that no shadow rests upon His glory, but that every sentence of His holy law, and every decree of punishment, however severe, is but the darker side of His own perfect holiness and truth.

That day will be a manifestation of *human character*. At present a very large portion of mankind are utterly unknown to their fellow-men. As to what they really are in their own inner life and history, they are as little known as if they were living in another planet. No doubt there are some transparent characters, transparent in vice and wickedness, or in their love to God or man; but most men live and act and speak under a mask. You take up the daily paper and you see that some one has violated the plainest command, has murdered a wife or child, has committed a gross fraud; but before this you had seen and known the man, but never imagined he were capable of such a crime. But the truth is that for months or years everything has been tending to this. There have been habits and courses of conduct, strengthened day by day, which could scarcely have had any other issue. Quite unobserved by those around, the evil has been quietly growing until it burst forth in some deed which calls down the universal reprobation of all who know him.

Or it may be the other way. There comes to light an act of more than ordinary self-sacrifice and devotion to the claims of duty. In the hour of danger a man is found equal to a sudden call, whereby he gives his life for another, or, unseen by the world around,

you hear of one whose secret and unostentatious kindness has made a poor widow's heart leap for joy. But in such cases again the character has been forming unperceived. It is only by chance that men happen to know what such a one really is.

The great day will bring all to light. No cloak, no pretence, no smooth tongue, no religious profession, no gifts of money to be seen of men, will the very least hide a man's true character.

The secret plans to defraud another, the craft of the envious, the cruelty of the selfish husband, the ill-temper of the wife that has sadly marred the life of her partner, the sin hidden by the blackness of night; or the ten thousand little seeds of kindness scattered far and wide by a thoughtful and loving hand, and the ten thousand times ten thousand moments when a patient spirit has meekly endured the crosses and ills of life, and amidst all has cried, "Thy will be done":—all this will no longer be concealed, but seen and recognised by the whole universe.

Especially then will there be a revelation of the character of men in *their relation to God*. It is in this aspect that men are least known in this life. Something of their disposition and conduct towards their fellow-men must be perceived, whilst in relation to God their true spirit and feeling may be altogether hidden. Yet this is far the most important. God

has far more claim upon each of us than the whole world together. He is our Maker, our Preserver, our Benefactor, our Redeemer, our Lawgiver. We belong to Him by every tie of duty and gratitude. The first commandment, the great commandment, is that we love Him with all the heart and soul and strength. And how this relation has been fulfilled will be fully revealed at the Lord's appearing.

It will then be nothing to the point that you have to some extent considered and fulfilled your obligations to your fellow-men. It will not atone for the neglect of the first table of the law that in a measure you kept the second. You cannot compound for your want of love to God by pleading that you have loved your neighbour. However blind men may be to the fact now, what you have been in relation to God, whether you have trusted His salvation, loved His name, yielded to His holy will, and striven to honour Him and please Him in the world,—it is this which will stand in the very forefront when all things shall be made manifest.

The great practical lesson which we should gather from the thought of coming judgment is the need of honest self-searching. We want to be thoroughly in earnest in discovering what we are and what we have been. We want to leave nothing to the chances of the future. We are aware that an inspector is

appointed on all our railways whose duty it is carefully and constantly to examine the line. He must take nothing for granted, but with the greatest circumspection he must see to the stability and good condition of bridges, tunnels, pillars, rails, points, and all else that appertains to the safety of the trains. In this way many an inconvenient jerk, many a terrific crash is avoided, and the lives of many passengers preserved.

We need to act in the same way with respect to the course of our own lives. We want to take nothing for granted. We want to examine our principles, our motives of action, the turns of life, how we act in testing-times, such as seasons of great prosperity or trial, on the commencement of new undertakings, our days of sickness and bereavement or the like.

Brother, sister, *put conscience in the witness-box for five minutes.* Tax your memory with past days, and look at your present life as in the light of God's holy law.

What about your life in the busy outside world? Is everything plain, straightforward, so that you would not mind a rival in trade, or one who bears you no goodwill, looking over all your books and accounts? Is everything in the shop, in the factory, in the market-place or on 'Change, in accordance with the strictest laws of truth and equity?

I once knew a man who was the steward for a large property, and when suddenly his books were required to be sent up to London for examination, not a shilling or a sixpence was found to be wrong.

What about your home life? Do you regard it as one of the spheres in which you are bound always to glorify God? Are you doing your best to let your light shine, and are those about you the better for the life you live? Do you keep the reins tight over tongue and temper, so that neither breaks out to do a mischief? Do you remember you are your "brother's keeper," yea, for all that, your children's, your servants', your sisters', or whoever else may live with you, and then carry this out by praying for them and doing what you can for their spiritual welfare?

What about your Church life? Are you a faithful member of Christ's Church, loving His house, caring for His poor, standing by His ministers, fetching back His lost ones, and labouring by all means to forward His kingdom in the world?

What about your inner life? Is secret prayer a reality? Are you daily desiring to walk with God? Are you guided by the precepts of His Word? Is Christ Himself your Refuge and your Resting-place, your Righteousness and Strength, your Guide and

your Shepherd, your Portion, and your exceeding Great Reward ?

Remember evermore that Christ is your Judge, and that your only preparation to meet Him is a living union with Him by faith.

I would commend to each reader of these pages the prayer which we find in the Te Deum :—

“ We believe that Thou shalt come to be our Judge.

“ We therefore pray Thee, help Thy servants whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy most precious blood.

“ Make them to be numbered with Thy saints in glory everlasting.”

“ Oh quickly come, dread Judge of all ;
For awful though Thine Advent be,
All shadows from the truth will fall,
And falsehood die on sight of Thee.
Oh quickly come ; for doubt and fear
Like clouds dissolve when Thou art near.

“ Oh quickly come, great King of all,
Reign all around us and within ;
Let sin no more our souls enthrall,
Let pain and sorrow die with sin.
Oh quickly come : for Thou alone
Canst make Thy scattered people one.”

IX.

A MEDITATION FOR THE CLOSE OF THE YEAR.

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.”—Ps. li. 17.

IN nothing do we see more the wisdom of God than in turning about that which is evil, and making it a means of great good. Look at the sin of David. It was in every way a great and daring transgression. Murder, adultery, and these covered by deceit, and in one who had received no common mercies at the hand of God—all this made the sin beyond measure sinful before the Lord. Moreover, by his sin he gave “great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.” But did not God so mercifully order it that in the issue the people of God had great occasion to rejoice? But for David’s sin we should never have possessed the fifty-first Psalm; and has not this been in all ages a treasury of devotion for humble and devout souls? In the hand of the Spirit has it not been a means of leading many a sinner into the way of peace? Let me mention a remarkable instance of this. A girl of fourteen was

sleeping with an elder sister. One night the latter rose from her bed when she thought her sister was fast asleep, and kneeling by the bedside she repeated, just audibly, the Psalm to which I refer. Her sister was awake and heard it, and the Spirit of God took the words and used them to her conversion. She lived for about sixty years afterwards, and her whole life was fragrant with prayer and praise and love, and fruitful in every good work.

I would take a single verse for our own meditation at this season. It may help us to close the year aright. For as we look back over another year of mercies, of opportunities, and consider how far we have failed to live as we might have done, nothing becomes us more than a humble, broken, contrite heart.

There may be some who speak of attaining a perfection where there is no room for sin. It seems to me our wiser plan is to learn more our infirmities, our shortcomings, our neglects, and whilst we ever set the highest standard possible before us for our aim, to take the very lowest place, and with the publican to cry, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

God delights in the lowly, humbled soul. No legal sacrifice, no offering of goat or lamb or bullock, could David bring that would be acceptable for a sin like his. But a heart crushed beneath the con-

sciousness of guilt, and owning the hatefulness of his sin before God—this, he knew, would be a sacrifice that would not be despised. With such God delights to dwell. He who hath his dwelling-place “in the high and holy place,” makes His abode also “with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isa. lvii. 15). Here is the temple to which God hath constant regard, not the material building however magnificent, but to Him that “is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at his word” (Isa. lxvi. 1, 2).

Here is the one to whom the Lord is close at hand to hearken to his prayer; for “the Lord is nigh to them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit” (Ps. xxxiv. 18).

Here is the one to whom the Lord ever tends as the Good Physician; for “He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds” (Ps. cxlvii. 3).

And has it not ever been thus? When Manasseh greatly humbled himself in his dungeon, did not God hear his cry and restore him to his throne? (2 Chron. xxxiii. 12.)

When the woman, so covered with the shame of her former life, bent in tears at His feet, did not Christ speak to her words of life and peace? Did He not say, “Thy sins are forgiven”? (Luke vii. 48.)

When Peter went out and wept bitterly for his threefold denial, did not the Master mark his tears, and appear to him *alone* on the day of the resurrection? (Luke xxiv. 34.)

Oh seek this precious boon of a heart ever tender, ever ready to own and confess sin, ever grieving more and more over sins of the past and sins of the present, being assured that no gift does the Lord more willingly impart by His Spirit, and that no gift more opens the door for the fulness of grace and joy which is in Christ Jesus.

Let me add a few thoughts as to the evil of sin, which may assist you in cherishing a spirit like this.

Consider *the bondage of sin*. Our Lord has declared that "he that committeth sin is the servant of sin." It is a true word. There are multitudes who are bond-slaves of sin in some form or other. The sin which at first seems but a silken thread becomes by and by an iron chain. There are men and women in the world who are conscious that sin is ruining their health and peace and home-comfort, and yet they cannot break away from it. In spite of an upbraiding conscience and a desire for a better life, it drags them down lower and lower. Ought not this to give us a hatred and dread of sin? Ought it not to humble us in the recollection of our liability to fall before its power? Ought it

not to bring us in consciousness of our weakness and proneness to evil to seek for help and deliverance from Him who alone can set us free?

Consider, too, *the infection of sin*. It so easily spreads from one to another. "One sinner destroyeth much good," for his sin draws others into the same path. It is evidently so with grosser sins. Intemperance, blasphemy, profligacy—these things are ever propagating themselves in all directions by the example of those who commit them. It is no less the case, though not so evidently, with more subtle forms of evil. For instance, you take a young lady who is punctual in religious duties, and against whom you could lay no charge of any glaring fault, but her heart is cold and indifferent towards her Saviour, and she has no desire for an earnest, Christian life. None can tell the evil influence which this spreads around her. It chills one who is just beginning to seek the Lord. It spreads an atmosphere of worldliness in many a circle. It discourages new efforts for good amongst Christians. And in many ways it does a vast amount of harm. Here is another reason for watchfulness and care and humiliation. Think how many souls you may have injured by your example. Perhaps, when you were quite unconscious of it, some remark you made, some heedless action had an effect for ill upon

another which will never be effaced. Can you have any sense of your duty to others and lightly treat a matter like this? It was the earnest prayer of one who had lived a very ungodly life, "O Lord, help me to do as much good as I have done harm!" May this, too, be our petition in the recollection of the evil that our influence may have wrought!

There is another point we ought not to pass by. Consider *the costliness of sin*. Jonah paid his fare to go to Tarshish in opposition to the will of God; but he never reached Tarshish, but only gained the scorn of the heathen sailors, a place in the fish's belly, and terrible hours of darkness and woe. And did ever any man in the end receive better wages for his sin? Before men invest their money in any purchase it is always worth while to count the cost. It is well worth a few moments' thought whether what they receive back will repay them for what they give. In this matter of sin it is especially so. You may gain some passing gratification. You may add a few pounds or a few hundreds to your income. You may escape some present trouble. But what does it cost in the end?

Sometimes it brings in this life shame and disgrace, poverty and rags, loss of home or life. But wilful, determined sin always costs that which is still more important than any of these. It costs a man

peace of conscience. It costs a man the salvation of his soul, the favour of God, hope on a deathbed, a glorious inheritance hereafter.

It costs a man all that makes this life or the next really valuable. It robs a man of all power to live a virtuous and useful life here, and of all prospect of a home in the kingdom of heaven. The costliness of sin ! Who can tell it out fully but the soul that is lost eternally ? I read lately an incident that seemed to speak very forcibly of the fearful issues of sin.

Canon Wilberforce was taking a holiday in the Isle of Skye. One day he noticed a magnificent golden eagle flying bravely upwards. He watched it with admiration and delight, but soon noticed that something was wrong with it. It seemed unable to proceed. It was stayed in its course, and by its uncertain movement showed that for some reason its strength was failing. Soon after it began to fall, and soon it lay, a few yards from his feet, a lifeless mass. What could have wrought the change ? No human hand had harmed it. No sportman's shot had reached it. He went to examine the bird, and what did he find ? It had carried up with it a little weasel in its talons, and as the eagle drew these near to its body for flight, the little creature had wormed itself out of them, and had drunk the life-blood from the eagle's breast.

How like sin is this! It may seem to be but a little one, but it fastens on the soul and worketh death. It destroys utterly all holy and heavenly desires, and leaves a man at length so dead in heart and conscience that all possibility of the new life is quenched for ever. Woe be to a man when such is the case! The Spirit grieved, the temple forsaken, God Himself giving a man up to his own wickedness!

A terrible cost for any sin, however sweet and tempting for the moment it may seem! Will you risk it? Will you venture on so great a danger? Nay, rather let the remembrance of your sins, and the certain issue of them, unless subdued and forgiven, make you confess and forsake them. Far better a heart broken for sin and from sin than that sin should itself crush and destroy all your peace, and bring to you at last that eternal death from which there is no deliverance.

Yet one other thought. Think of sin as having wounded and slain your best Friend. Whatever Christ endured was the bitter fruit of sin. Not a pang of sorrow shot through His tender heart, not a wound on His sacred body, not a moment of desolation, not a thorn in His brow, or a nail in hand or foot, or one of those unknown griefs which lay so heavily upon Him but which we cannot fathom—not one arose but through our sin.

Shall not this assist our repentance, and enable us the more to humble ourselves before God? Well is it through the Spirit to look upon Him whom we have pierced and mourn!

Flow, my tears, flow still faster,
Thus my guilt and sin bemoan;
Mourn, my heart, in deeper anguish,
Over sorrows not thine own!
See, a spotless Lamb draw nigh
To Jerusalem, to die
For thy sins,—the sinless One.
Think! ah, think! what thou hast done!

Can we view the Saviour given
To the smiter's hands for us?
Can we all unmoved, unhumbled,
See Him mocked and slighted thus,—
View the thorny chaplet made
For His meek and silent head,—
Hear the loud and angry din,
And not tremble for our sin?

Follow from the hall of judgment
This sad Saviour on His way;
But in spirit, as ye journey,
Often pause, and humbly pray—
Pray the Father to behold
By the Son thy ransom told,
And a substitute for thee
In His Well-beloved see!

Must I, Jesus, thus behold Thee
In Thy toil and sorrow here ?
Can I nothing better yield Thee
Than my unavailing tear ?
Lamb of God ! I weep for thee !
Weep, thy cruel cross to see !
Weep, for death that death destroys !
Weep for grief that brings me joys.

“A broken and contrite heart !” Do you possess it ? Is there at least something of this spirit ? Have you ceased to make excuses for sin ? Have you been made willing to take your true place—as a sinner—as a criminal in God’s sight—as one having not a shadow of merit, or goodness, or *rightness* of any kind before Him ? Is it your prayer that you may know your iniquity and sin, and then utterly renounce it ? Remember that *only a broken heart can receive a bruised and crucified Saviour*. No soul without conviction of sin wrought by the Holy Ghost ever yet truly believed in Christ. There are many who cry “Come to Christ !” “Come to Christ !” who yet fail to show the steps by which men can come to Him, especially the first step, namely, self-condemnation, self-abasement for our manifold transgressions. Here is the old path ; here is the only safe path ; fall low on thy knees, cast away every cloak and covering, cry in thy heart, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee ;” then look up : Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away

the sin of the world ! Look unto Him, and be saved for evermore.

It may be that some one reads these lines with real self-reproach. There is a great stumbling-block in your path. You long for a broken and contrite heart, but you write bitter things against yourself, because you seem to yourself so unmoved and insensible to the greatness of your sin. You dread more than anything a hard heart, and yet this is the one thing you seem unable to get quit of. In such a case, I would remind you that a broken heart is not a Saviour, and that *he who mourns the lack of it most certainly, in some measure, possesses it.* But by no means let this temptation keep you away from Christ. He is "exalted to give repentance and remission of sins," and He alone can give it you. You cannot work right and humble feelings in yourself. They must come from Christ, and He will give them to those who ask them at His hands.

I remember some few years ago meeting a young woman at a mission to whom this matter was a great burden. "I have been trying for two years to make myself feel my sins, and I cannot," was her sorrowful lament. I had been preaching on Christ's words, "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. xxiii. 37); so I

said to her, "Suppose a little chick were half frozen in a barn-yard, and could scarcely feel itself alive from numbness, what would be the best thing for it to do? Would it not be to flee at once to the warmth of the hen's wing?" I think she saw her mistake. I think she learnt that those who would learn more of their sin, and who desire a more contrite spirit, can find it nowhere so surely and fully as in nearness to Jesus, trusting only in His grace, and finding their shelter beneath His merciful wings.

"Retreat beneath His wings,
And in His grace confide ;
This more exalts the King of kings
Than all your works beside."

I would suggest to every reader who has known something of this difficulty a prayer from our Litany, which has often been a help to myself. It is a prayer, in fact, which suits the soul in every stage of the Christian life. It seems to me also so full, so wide, so all-inclusive, as to embrace every need that we can possibly experience. It is admirably suited likewise for one looking back over a year that is closing, and over former years which cannot be recalled.

Take the petition and adopt it for your own individual use: "That it may please Thee to give *me* true repentance, to forgive *me* all *my* sins, negli-

gencies, and ignorances, and to endue *me* with the grace of Thy Holy Spirit to amend *my* life according to Thy Holy Word."

Such a petition, offered to the Saviour in humble reliance upon His grace, can never be in vain. It honours His name as the Saviour of sinners, and He will assuredly fulfil it; for He hath said, "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out."

X.

A NEW YEAR'S RESOLVE.

“Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business ?”—
LUKE ii. 49.

THIS word of Christ is distinguished from every other utterance that He spoke, for, with its context, it is the only saying that is recorded from the lips of Christ until the time that He was about to enter upon His public ministry. Out of the deep silence of thirty years this saying therefore comes to us with double emphasis. It was the Saviour's answer to His mother's complaint. After three days, one spent on the homeward journey, one on the return to Jerusalem, and the third in searching Him out, Joseph and Mary come upon Him in the temple, sitting among the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions. “Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us ? Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing.” Then comes the reply, gently rebuking her calling Joseph His father, and showing how truly He had already grasped something of His calling and

mission. "How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?"

It was a far-reaching word. It seems to cover the whole field of the Saviour's life. It was the epitome of all that He afterwards ever spoke or wrought or suffered. The spirit of the words we can discern in every discourse, in every miracle, in every portion of His work and in every incident of His passion.

It is interesting to place side by side four sayings of Christ as expressing the same constant aim and purpose.

We have the word of Christ in prophecy, uttered by David a thousand years before His advent: "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me; I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart" (Ps. xl. 7, 8). Then we have the words of the text spoken when He was twelve years old, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" Then we have His word spoken by the well of Sychar after the conversion of the woman: "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work" (John iv. 34). Lastly, we have the word in His great intercessory prayer, looking onward to the full completion of His work after the next few hours of shame and bitterness of agony: "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have

finished the work Thou gavest Me to do" (John xvii. 4).

These four passages breathe the same spirit and testify to the one prevailing motive. From the beginning to the end the eye was single and the aim fixed. He had no desire but one. Through life, through death, He would honour His Father and perfectly fulfil the work put into His hands.

And should not this be the Christian's purpose likewise? Has not the Master left, as it were, the footprints in the "sands of time" that we may place our foot in the very same spot? Do we not need some worthy aim, some steadfast motive, which may direct our steps as we meet the temptations which are sure to assail us? And can we find a better or a nobler one than this?

Life is very short, but it is very long. It is short if you measure it by our passing joys or sorrows, by the number of our days and months and years, by the increasing speed with which time slips by; but it is long if you reckon it by the infinite value of each moment, by the link which connects our days here with the life beyond the grave, by the issues of eternal moment to ourselves and to others.

Shall we not therefore make the best of this coming year, or of whatever time may yet be granted to us? Shall we not sanctify and ennable each portion

of it with a resolve like this, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?"

True, many are very eager about the business that pertains to this life. Not a few are active in making a business of pleasure. Some go about other people's business and neglect their own. And alas! multitudes go about the devil's business, practising all sorts of evil themselves and drawing others into the same net.

But what about the "Father's business?" Who cares for this and makes it their supreme concern? But will not *you* henceforth, even if you have not hitherto?

In your necessary toil, in the duties that you owe to master or servant, husband or wife, parent or child, will you not let this one thought rise above all and overshadow all and direct you in all: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

But how may you do this? How may you do this cheerfully, hopefully, and continue doing it even to the end?

I will try to give you words of counsel that may help you.

First of all, you must be one with Christ. You must be united to Him by the link of true faith. You must thus drink into His spirit, and be actuated by something of the same motive as filled His breast.

For what was the secret of Christ's zeal in doing the will of God? Was it not in the words "My Father"? He looked up to heaven and loved His Father, and knew that His Father loved Him, and so to be about His "Father's business" was the joy and delight of His soul.

Can you look up to the bright home above, and say, "My Father"? Do you make a Father's love the solace and comfort of your life? Here you must begin, if you would find it your happiness in being about your Father's business.

And you can only find this consolation by making Christ the sole object of your reliance. Out of Christ the dark cloud of former sins separates you from God. You can have no confidence before Him. But drawing nigh through the name and in the mediation of Christ, you can take up your position at once as a reconciled child; you can cry, "Abba, Father," and then, in the joy of His salvation, you will be enabled to do His will.

Be sure you begin here. Unless you receive Christ at first, and a free and full pardon in Him, you cannot serve God willingly and joyfully. But if you do, a holy gladness and a filial spirit will enable you to walk at liberty as you keep the commandments of God.

To be about your Father's business *you must learn*

to know His will by a diligent study of His holy Word.

A nobleman is about to leave his home for some months. He has a large garden in which he takes great pleasure. So, before he goes, he writes out full directions for the use of the head gardener. There are trees he wishes to be cut down, and plants and shrubs which he would have removed. There are vines which need to be trained, and various changes to be made in the beds and walks. There are seeds of many sorts to be put into the ground at the appropriate season, and work of all kinds to be done which will occupy the whole time of the gardener and those under him. It is all carefully put down in black and white, so that there need be no mistake; and if the gardener is faithful to his master's wishes, he will constantly consult the paper of directions he has received.

We, too, have our work to do in the garden of Christ's Church. Nor are we left to our own choice or judgment as to what we must do or how we must do it. The Master has left us full particulars. There is no part of our duty forgotten in the plain record of His Word. There are precepts and principles laid down which are enough to guide us at all times. How we are to act in our own private life, how we are to guide our conduct in the world,

how we are to labour for the good of others — all this is easily discovered by the patient and earnest student of the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" the teachings of the Word. Pray for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit as you ponder the sacred page. Be willing to subject your own will to God's will. Follow the light you receive, and you may be certain that in all essential matters God will guide you aright, and make the path plain before your face.

Would you be about your Father's business?

Then *you must strive to keep clear of sin*. This is the one thing that God hates. Therefore, if you wish to do His will, you will avoid it, and watch against it, however attractive be the form in which it appears.

Learn the holy art of discovering the wiles of the wicked one. Let a tender conscience be one of your choice treasures, and let it speak out about sin wherever it puts its foot. It may be in a book, in a pleasant companion, in an evening's amusement. It may strive to do you a mischief in the inner shrine of your own heart, or in the sanctuary of God's house. It may come across you in the street, or in the house of business. It may look so small that friends may think you over-scrupulous in so judging it. It may come to you as an

angel of light, and promise you even spiritual advantages if you consent to it.

But keep a careful look-out. Judge righteous judgment. Look at everything in the light of God's presence and God's Word; and when you see the evil, do not touch it with your little finger. Guard, too, against all occasions of wrong-doing. Do not make danger and temptation for yourself. Do not tarry near danger. Do not play with fire or poison, or go near the edge of the precipice. But keep far away from sin, and everything likely to lead to it, and make it your constant aim and prayer to be kept from the very least deviation from God's holy law.

If you would be about your "Father's business," *remember your religion must shine in the home circle.* For eighteen years after Christ spoke this word of solemn resolve, He lived in the retirement of Nazareth, a holy child, in the home of Joseph and Mary, and afterwards the stay of His mother, when, as it would seem, Joseph had passed away. Here was the circle in which Christ did His Father's will. And this, too, is the circle in which your light must appear. Be a Christian, and act as a Christian in your own home. Let your words and deeds by your own fireside prove most clearly that your eye is single. There may be something uncongenial, some-

thing that is trying to the flesh, but this is God's school of discipline in which to perfect patience.

Think often of such words as these:—"I will walk in my house with a perfect heart." "A soft answer turneth away wrath." "Blessed are the peacemakers." "Blessed are the meek." "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you."

Be assured that there is no place like home for bringing glory to God. If you seek grace to be kind, gentle, and unselfish, diligent in the duties that devolve upon you, crucifying self-will, irritation, murmuring, and wrong tempers, never uttering sharp, snappish, satirical, or hasty words, you are doing the very best thing you can to recommend to those who live with you the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

Neither must you forget that *your "Father's business" lies in your ordinary calling.* The Lord Jesus as fully carried out His Father's will when He was engaged in some homely bit of carpentering at Nazareth, as when afterwards He preached from the Mount of Olives to a vast concourse of people, or when He called Lazarus from the grave at Bethany.

It is not the work you do, but the spirit in which you do it, that makes it acceptable service to God.

Go to the work of your calling, brother, whatever it be, and do it for God. Go to your place of business, to the factory, to the busy mart, to the field or the garden, to your regular engagement in travelling from town to town, or calling from door to door, and believe it that God is with you, and that He will guide and prosper you in all you have to do. Believe it that this common work of yours, and the way you do it, may be as a sweet savour to Him who searcheth your heart. Only do it heartily as unto Him, avoiding whatever may mar your offering or bring discredit on the religion you profess.

*"Let every man wherein he is called, *therein abide with God*" (I Cor. vii. 24).*

Another point I should like you to notice. *Your "Father's business" will lie not seldom in your Father's house.* The reading of the question of Christ, as given in the text of the Revised Version, has reference to this: "Wist ye not that I must be in My Father's house?" Though perhaps the marginal reading, keeping to the passage as in the old version, may be preferable, yet the thought is not to be passed over. Christ loved His Father's house. He loved the Temple, and He loved the synagogue at Nazareth, and was wont, Sabbath by Sabbath, to

frequent it. Nor was it otherwise in His public ministry. Again and again do we find Him in the synagogues of Galilee or in the Temple at Jerusalem.

The devout Christian will no less be a lover of the courts of the Lord. There is a blessing to be found there. A thousand hearts uniting in prayer and praise raise the soul nearer to heaven. Nor will the green pastures of divine truth be without their strengthening and sanctifying power. Above all, the Christian loves there to recognise the presence of his Lord, and by assembling with his fellow-worshippers to set forth the honour and reverence which he owes to the Triune God.

The whole world is full of those who rob Jehovah of His glory, by wicked blasphemies, by dishonour done to His day and His Word. Shall not Christians strive to glorify Him by holy worship, joyful praises, and an open confession of faith in His name?

Lastly, to be about your "Father's business," you must reckon it your privilege *to do your utmost in winning souls for righteousness and for God.* Here was the work in which Christ laboured, and for which He suffered and died. Every sermon that He preached, every deed of mercy that He performed, had this aim in view. He knew the value of souls. He knew that each had been made in God's image, and that by grace

that image might be renewed again, even in those who had fallen most deeply. He knew the judgment of God that would fall upon the impenitent, and the unspeakable joys that were prepared for the righteous. Therefore He pleaded with the woman at the well, and delighted to pardon the palsied man, and spoke words of peace to the sinner in the house of Simon. Therefore He wept over Jerusalem and prayed for His murderer, and welcomed the dying malefactor, and willingly yielded up His life as a sacrifice for human guilt. And now that He has ascended to His glory, He leaves it to His Church to carry on this great work.

Do you ask the Master, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Here is His answer: "Go forth as a labourer in My vineyard. Break up the hard and fallow ground. Sow the heavenly seed of divine truth. Reap in My harvest field. Gather in the precious sheaves. According to your gifts, be a worker amongst rich or poor, young or old. Speak a word in kindness by the wayside. Rescue a perishing one from the iron chain of intemperance. Show to the unbeliever the mighty power of the gospel. Restore the backslider. Strengthen the weak. Let it be your prayer and effort never to let a day pass without doing something to win a soul for Christ."

For such work, done in Christ's name and out of

love to Him, there is a great reward. Nothing more tends to preserve alive the flame of grace within. Nothing will more add to the brightness of your crown in the day of Christ's appearing.

But for all this, for every part of your Christian life, you need incessant and believing prayer for the divine aid of the Holy Spirit. Without this, faith and love and zeal grow faint, and the world's temptations come back in mighty power, and you cannot overcome them. Every day and every hour learn to remember your own weakness and to lean on the strength of Jesus. Wait upon Him perpetually for the inworking of His Spirit, teaching, sanctifying, quickening, and renewing your soul.

“I could not do without Thee,
I cannot stand alone ;
I have no strength or goodness,
No wisdom of my own ;
But Thou, beloved Saviour,
Art all in all to me ;
And perfect strength in weakness
Is theirs who lean on Thee.”

“Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?”

Again, before I close, let me ask, Is this the fixed purpose of your heart? Is this the answer you give to every one who would turn you aside? I know

there are many voices whispering in your ear, but it is a noble thing to give this reply to every suggestion of the tempter.

It may be the passions of youth are strong, and would rebel against strict and careful living. They would plead for license and self-indulgence, and refuse any regard to the Saviour's holy example. But you must stand firm. You must choose the higher and more lasting joy, and disdain anything that is inconsistent with loving obedience to the Father. You must hold fast by your resolution, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?"

Or perhaps you might be persuaded to be content with the standard of those around you. "*You must not be over-zealous or over-particular lest you seem to condemn other Christians. You must be satisfied with an ordinary walk, and not imagine that you can attain anything of eminence in grace and holiness.*" Nay, you must not hearken to this sort of reasoning. You have One to please, and only One. You must not stay short of anything less than constant, pains-taking effort in everything to please God. If every other Christian takes lower ground, you must not. "Teach me to do the thing that pleaseth Thee!" "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

Or perhaps there comes the phantom of "a more convenient season." At present your future prospects and the claims of a family demand more laxity, both of purpose and practice. Many things in the way of trade you cannot dispense with, though conscience tells you they are wrong. "By and by," so a flattering voice whispers, "it will be different. It will be better to delay for a time any definite resolution." Beware of this vision of deceit and falsehood. You dare not trust to to-morrow. The mountain will be as hard to climb then as now. The river will be as difficult to cross. The guile of the tempter will be as plausible then as to-day. Nay, face the foe at once. Meet your difficulties this very hour. Sweep away all cobweb excuses, all crafty devices, with this mighty Word of Christ. This very day, this very hour, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

Yes, brethren, you "must." If you would know peace and salvation, you must do as your Father bids you. Obedience is essential to salvation. For wherever there is true faith there will be love, and wherever there is love there will be "the keeping of the commandments of God."

Yes, you must be about your Father's business. Never, never can you know a Father's love, never can you walk beneath His smile, never can you

depend upon His mighty protection, never can you sit down in the Father's house, unless, day by day, you strive to do His will, and fulfil His commandments.

“ What shall I render, O my Lord,
For all Thy love bestowed on me,
For pardon, peace, and hope of heaven ?
To follow Thee.

What is a nobler privilege
Than earth's high honours can afford,
Surpassing kingdom, praise, or power ?
To serve my God.”

XI.

A NEW YEAR'S PROMISE.

“Himself hath said, I will in nowise fail thee, neither will I in anywise forsake thee.”—HEB. xiii. 5, Rev. Version.

THERE is something most instructive in the history of this promise. It was first given to Joshua as he was setting forth on his way to take possession of the promised land and to cast out the Canaanites, whose cup of iniquity was now full. “There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so will I be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Josh. i. 5).

We find the words again referred to by David in his charge to Solomon his son, in prospect of the work lying before him in the building of the Temple. David said to Solomon his son, “Be strong and of good courage and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed; for the Lord God, even my God, will be with thee; He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord” (1 Chron. xxviii. 20).

Now we find that the inspired author of the Epistle to the Hebrews takes it right out of the heart of Old Testament history, stamps it afresh with divine authority, and sends it forth for the consolation of all Christian people in all ages of the Christian Church.

The apostle's dealing with this promise teaches us a truth full of encouragement. The grand promises scattered through the pages of the Old Testament are not limited in their use to those to whom they were first spoken. They were intended, in the purpose of the Divine Spirit, for all such as they were fitted to comfort and assist.

Wherever there is a humble soul, conscious of sin and needing pardon, the great promise of Isaiah applies to that man. "Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (i. 18).

Wherever there is a man conscious of moral depravity and harshness, and desiring renewal, there is for such a one the great promise given in Ezekiel: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you. I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and will give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. xxxvi. 26).

It is so with the rest of God's promises. Put your

finger on those most suited to your case. Think over them, receive them, rejoice in them. If a believer in Christ, you have a right to every one of them. You may claim them as your portion and your heritage for ever.

It is this truth which the Apostle Peter teaches us in his Second Epistle (i. 20). "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation." This passage has nothing to do with private judgment, but declares that Holy Scripture is not to be limited to one special case or individual, but that it has a wider and a larger purpose, having its lessons of comfort, warning, or instruction for the whole Church of God.

But let us go back to the promise given to the Hebrews. It is a staff on which we may lean all through the coming year. It is a precious rill of the river of the water of life from which our souls may drink and be refreshed. It is a shield of defence in which we may meet all the enemies of our salvation. It is a firm rock on which we may place the foot when the floods threaten to overwhelm us. Come what will in the changeful events of the future, let the days and weeks of this year come to us clothed in gloom and sorrow, or radiant with brightness and hope, still may we be of good courage if we can hear the voice of our Almighty Friend

whispering in the ear, "I will in nowise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee."

But who amongst us can lay claim to this promise? Who amongst us has a right to say, "This is a Father's voice speaking to my very heart"? Consider this for a few moments. Remember to whom it was originally spoken. It was to Joshua. And is there something in your character corresponding to his?

Joshua was *a man of faith*. He trusted in the arm of Jehovah. When the ten spies discouraged the souls of the people, and alarmed them with reports of the strength of their adversaries, Joshua and Caleb stood firm and bade the people go forward. Their enemies would be but bread for them. Their defence was departed. The Lord was on the side of Israel.

Have you something of this faith? Do you believe God's power and promise, and rest upon His truth? Do you trust in God through Christ as your Protector and Preserver?

Again, Joshua was *a servant of Jehovah*. It is the title of honour constantly joined to his name—"Joshua, the servant of the Lord." In the presence of the hosts of Israel he declared his steadfast purpose, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Is this your spirit likewise? Do you reckon it your highest privilege to be numbered amongst the servants of the Lord of hosts? Have you forsaken every other master that you may serve the Lord, and Him only?

Again, Joshua was *a brave warrior for the kingdom of God*. Under the Captain of the Lord's host, he fought manfully against the enemies of Israel, and by the help of God he gained the victory. Have you enrolled your name as a good soldier of "the King of kings"? Are you fulfilling your baptismal pledge, "to fight manfully against sin, the world, and the devil"? Do you set your face against sin both in yourself and others? Do you strive to win men to the side of truth and righteousness and the fear of God? Is your influence felt to be in the right direction? Are you a courageous confessor of Christ's name, never ashamed of your Lord, but owning Him in face of ridicule and contempt?

Answer these questions to your own heart and conscience. Are you indeed in covenant with God? Have you yielded yourself to His service? Have you put on the heavenly armour, and are you fighting the Lord's battles? Have you that which is the root of it all, a true faith in the Son of God, trusting in Him as your only Advocate, and relying upon His atoning sacrifice as the only ground of your

hope? You cannot claim the Lord's promises unless you are one of the Lord's true people. You might walk over a magnificent estate and admire the beauty which greets you on every side, but you could not speak of it and rejoice in it as your own, unless you had the title-deeds in your own possession.

It is thus with God's promises. No tongue can declare the glory and preciousness of this rich inheritance. It brings untold wealth to the possessor, both in this life and in the next. But have you the title-deeds? Have you the Spirit witnessing to your sonship in the Lord's family? Have you that heaven-born faith in Christ to which all the promises belong?

If so, the promise of the text is for you. And there is none that goes beyond it. Take it, as given in the old version, "He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Who can tell what multitudes of God's children in every age have rested on this word, and have found by experience that the Lord never left them, but was ever by their side? Or take it as in the new version, the meaning is still the same, though perhaps somewhat more forcibly expressed, "Himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee; neither will I in any wise forsake thee."

The great "Himself" stands out so boldly in face of all failings and forsakings. For we may not forget that in the days and years that lie before us,

there is not one single person, not one single treasure we value, but, in the providence of God, may fail or forsake us.

One day you may be surrounded by kindred and friends, the next they may have flown away as the swallows at the approach of winter.

“ Fathers may hate us or forsake,
God’s foundlings then are we ;
Mother or child no pity take,
But we shall still have Thee. ”

More than this. All earthly prospects may fail you. Bright hopes may be dashed to the ground by an unlooked-for disappointment. Business may prove unsuccessful, and the few hundreds which were your all may be lost in the venture you made. Your own health may fail you. Sight and hearing and strength for work may fail. Those you have depended upon to help you in a rainy day may fail. Yes, and your own heart may fail you, and, like David in the hour of distress, you may fear that you will surely perish in your trouble.

But there is one who faileth never. The Great “ Himself,” the Great “ I ” of our text, the Triune Jehovah, the Father who loves you ; the Saviour who redeemed you, He who is unchangeable, Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever ; the Blessed Comforter, the Spirit of consolation and

peace, here is the presence that will never fail you, but will accompany you right through your journey and bring you in safety to the city of habitation.

Another peculiar beauty of this passage lies in the deep meaning of its negatives. We have no less than five negatives one upon another. To give clear effect to each of these it has been translated, "No, I will *not* leave thee; no, no, I will not forsake thee."

But no less powerful is the translation which the Revisers have given us: "I will in *no wise* fail thee, neither will I in *any wise* forsake thee."

Couple with this the great "*in no wise*" of reception. To the very end of time anxious, troubled, tempted, sin-burdened souls will rejoice in this, "Him that cometh unto Me I will *in no wise* cast out" (John vi. 37). With such an invitation, who need despair of acceptance with Christ?

Then we have the solemn "*in no wise*" of exclusion. "There shall *in no wise* enter into it" (i.e. the city of God) "anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie, but they that are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. xxi. 27).

What impenitent, unbelieving soul will ever be able hereafter to pass this barrier, and find access into the home of God's saints?

But in Heb. xiii. 5 we have the "*in no wise*" of

God's fidelity to His people. There is no possibility of His failing or forsaking them. Through storm and sunshine, through rough waters and smooth, through the darkness or the light, He remaineth faithful still.

It may be ere this year close one who reads these lines may learn the meaning of trouble as you have never learnt it before. You may be all alone, and trial upon trial may come upon you. You may stand like a solitary pillar in the desert, on which every storm and tempest blows. But God Himself will be with you. He will be your refuge and strength. He will not "fail thee nor forsake thee."

It may be that during this year you may be sorely buffeted by the enemy and distressed by the fiery darts of the wicked one. You may walk as under a black cloud when neither sun nor moon nor star appears. You may be driven almost to despair by the remembrance of past sins, or the apparent impossibility of doing right, or by the peculiar difficulties by which you are surrounded. But here is light. God is with you, and though you cannot see a door of escape, He can pierce the dark cloud and open your way and bring you into peace and liberty.

Or, it may be, this year is to close your earthly pilgrimage. You have been following Christ, and looking to Him as your example in life's pathway,

but soon you are to follow Him through the valley and the river. Perhaps you shrink back from the prospect. The fear of death has not yet been overcome. But the promise will hold good. The Lord of life and glory will be with you. Timid, nervous, fearful as your spirit is now, He can deliver you from all this. He can make every shadow of alarm flee away and fill you with joy and hope. He can dissipate all gloomy anticipations and shed a heavenly peace within your soul. At least you may expect that He will be so near to you that you shall not be afraid.

I heard not long ago a mention of the words of an eminent servant of Christ when near to death. He was asked whether "he did not wish to live longer than he might be better prepared to die." But he answered that if he lived twenty years, he "could never have a better Saviour than he had at that moment." It is thus the Lord comforts His people. He manifests Himself in His tender mercy and loving kindness. He is seen to be near at hand, meeting all the needs of the soul. "The Lord is thy everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended."

A practical suggestion or two may close our meditation upon this encouraging promise.

In the light of this promise, and in dependence

upon its fulfilment, *cast aside all over-anxiety about wealth and the increase of this world's good.* "Be free from the love of money." Why? Because you are so rich already. I read but a little while ago of a legacy of nearly half a million being left to the Pope. But you have a far greater legacy in this promise. The Lord who owns earth and heaven is your God, and is pledged to supply all your need. He will never fail you, and all that He has is yours. Therefore be not anxious about the riches you might accumulate here. They may only prove to be a snare to you or your children. I have heard of one who was in possession of millions, and at the end he said that a golden wall seemed to block his way and shut him out from the kingdom. Therefore put God's kingdom and righteousness first. Do your duty bravely and faithfully in His sight, seeking His favour and His approval in all you do. As to the rest, be perfectly content with His appointment. If He give you increase of means, hold it with a loose hand, put a large tax upon it for Christian and benevolent objects, and use every shilling of it as a steward who must give account for the talent committed to you.

If, on the other hand, He deny you such means as you would desire, thank Him for the untold wealth He has granted you in His faithful promises.

Remember the old saying, "If you cannot bring your circumstances to your mind, bring your mind to your circumstances." Learn the holy art of glad contentment. Go on your way singing of the Saviour's grace:—

" My Jesus, as Thou wilt,
 If needy here and poor,
 Give me Thy people's bread,
 Their portion rich and sure.
 The manna of Thy Word
 Let my soul feed upon ;
 And if all else should fail,
 My Lord, Thy will be done."

In the strength of this promise *go forth bravely, fearlessly, hopefully, into the varyiny events of the coming year.* You know not what the craft of the devil or the wickedness of man may purpose against you. You know not where danger may come upon you, or trouble assail you. But you know who is on your side and who will stand by you. Therefore be of good courage. Say in your heart and with your lips, "The Lord is my helper, I will not fear: what shall man do unto me?" Come what will, with the Eternal God as your Refuge, the Ever-lasting arms beneath you, and the All-sheltering wing over you, you may rejoice and be at rest. Let your faith in God's love and care grow and increase. Trust to the Lord utterly. Never doubt that He

will still abide with you till this year is past, and every year of your pilgrimage is over, and you sit down in the Father's House.

Then, too, in the strength of this word, *be faithful even unto death*. Does the living God promise "in no wise to fail or forsake thee"? And will not you strive never to "fail or forsake" His cause or His people? If He is so faithful to you, will not you endeavour to be faithful to the interests of His kingdom and the honour of His name? Surely you will. Day by day go forth into life's battle-field, strong in His strength, to wage war against every enemy of your salvation and every province of the dominion of Satan. Thus make it your aim in some measure to reflect the faithfulness of God. Remember the assurance, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

" Poor is all that I can offer,
Soul and body while I live ;
Take it, O my Saviour, take it,
I have nothing more to give.

Come, and in this heart remain,
Let each enemy be slain;
Let me live and die with Thee,
To Thy kingdom welcome me

XII.

AN ORDINATION SERMON.¹

“ What shall I cry ? ”—ISA. xi. 6.

THESE words come to me linked with the holy and devoted life of one of Christ's most faithful servants. For about forty years he laboured in one town, for most of that time working incessantly in one large parish, gathering hundreds of men into his night-schools, raising up a body of 600 communicants ; preaching often with his lips, and always by his life. Three years ago came the end. His dying room was a very heaven ; his lips were filled with the loving kindness of the Lord ; his cup was running over. His lifelong prayer had been abundantly answered. His three children were all workers in the Lord's vineyard, and his only son had just been promised by his Diocesan the church where he himself had so long been working. It was on the study wall of this good man that I was first struck with the words

¹ Preached at St. Andrew's, Derby, on St. Thomas' Day, 1883.

of the text. It was one of his constant petitions. At home or abroad, for the church or the schoolroom, for the pulpit or the platform, his frequent prayer was, "Lord, what shall I cry?"

This day a voice seems to arise with the same question. "I am just entering upon a great work. I am called to be an ambassador, a watchman, a steward of the Lord of hosts, to teach, to feed, and provide for the Lord's family. How shall I best fulfil this work? Can you give me any guidance and help for this charge committed to me? 'What shall I cry?' 'What shall I cry?' It is a solemn question; for I am not sent to broach my own opinions, or theories, or doubts, or guesses after truth. As an ambassador of the great King, I must carry His message, and not my own. Must I not take heed to speak that which the Lord hath put in my mouth?" Nor is there any doubt what the message is. The context will tell us. It is His own inspired Word of truth, applied, as He may enable us, to the sins and sorrows, the cares and wants, of those committed to our care. "All flesh is grass, and the goodliness thereof as a flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." Well does our Church in her Ordination service reflect this answer of the prophet. Here is one of the questions put to those who are

candidates for the priesthood: "Are you persuaded that the Holy Scriptures contain sufficiently all doctrine required of necessity for eternal salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ? And are you determined out of the said Scriptures to instruct the people committed to your charge, and to teach nothing as required of necessity to eternal salvation but that which you shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the Scripture?" The answer is to be given, "I am so persuaded, and am so determined by God's grace." Again the question comes, "What shall I cry?" What are those great and prominent truths of Holy Scripture which I must specially take heed to proclaim? Four or five points stand out very distinctly.

(1.) *The blackness, the deformity, and the terrible issues of sin.* We must bring out the holy law of God and show the way in which it is broken. "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." A popular hymn has it,

"We magnify His strictness with
A zeal He will not own."

And again—

"There is no place (as in heaven)
Where earth's failings have such
Kindly judgment given."

In my judgment all this is utterly false and hollow.

It is confounding the law and the gospel. The strictness of God's law is utterly beyond our utmost thoughts. Sin is hateful and abominable wherever it is found. Even Moses, so faithful to God, was shut out of Canaan for what might have seemed to many a trivial fault. If thou wouldest be faithful, brother, speak out manfully about sin. Don't be afraid to speak of pride, covetousness, selfishness, intemperate habits, commercial dishonesty, the vice of gambling, the impurity which is such a blot on our country. Don't be afraid to speak out about family faults, evil tempers, snappish, irritable words and ways. Don't be afraid to speak of the bitter fruits of sin. With all tenderness, but with all boldness, speak of judgment to come, the second death, the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched. Dare not to hide God's truth about this. True charity is not to speak smooth things, but to hold out the danger signal, to tell of the fiery wrath of God against sin, and then to weep and grieve over the perishing, and by all means to strive to win them for life and glory.

(2.) *The immeasurable love of God in Christ.* Here is an ocean we can never fathom. Here is a land flowing with milk and honey. Here is a glorious sun whose beams reach down to the darkest hovel of misery and sin. Here is a mountain whose summit

we can never climb. Here is a fountain whose waters will never be exhausted. Alas for souls where the ministry is full of reproof, warning, threatening, even scolding, but where there is little of the love of God and the love of Christ! Whatever else you leave out, never leave out the love of God. Let it shine forth in all its warmth, joy, and blessedness. Cry aloud of God's love. Go down to the most wicked and depraved, and tell him "there is love in the heart of God for thee. Perchance thou hast worn out every human love—the love of father or mother, brother or sister—but there is a place for thee in the heart of God if thou wilt have it. Go down into the coal-mines, into the streets and lanes of the city, go everywhere and tell of God's free love and mercy. Go to the child of sorrow, to the one who has buried his greatest earthly treasure, and tell him of the healing balm of God's love. Go tell men that though they be enemies and rebels, there is compassion for them in God if only they will receive it. Go sound forth that Magna Charta of a sinner's hope, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

(3.) *A present, complete, gratuitous justification received by the hand of faith.* Thank God for that glorious robe prepared for the sinner through the

work of Christ ! Thank God for a righteousness outside of us, outside of any work or services, outside of any virtues, or graces, or feelings of our own—a righteousness perfect, spotless, stainless, in which the believing soul may ever rejoice. Thank God that when a man has learned to see himself an utter bankrupt, an infinite debtor to God's justice, a criminal at God's bar, he may come and glory in a righteousness which is in Christ Jesus alone. Here is the foundation of all peace, the starting-post for a holy life, and a sure ground for confidence in the hour of death. A few weighty words were once written by one of Europe's greatest benefactors—one, too, himself deeply bruised in the winepress of sore distress for sin : “Wearied at length with your own righteousness, rejoice and confide in the righteousness of Christ. Learn, brother, to know Christ and Him crucified, and to despair of thyself, and to sing to the Lord this song : ‘Lord Jesus, Thou art my righteousness, but I am Thy sin. Thou hast taken what belonged to me ; Thou hast given me what was Thine. Thou becamest what Thou wert not, that I might become what I was not myself.’”¹

(4.) *The absolute necessity for a holy walk and a life consecrated to the service of God.* “What shall I

¹ Luther's letter to a friend.

cry?" "As He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation." "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." "Be ye imitators of God as beloved children." "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." The sort of religion which boasts of forgiveness, and yet is lax and careless as to holiness of life, is a sham, a delusion, and a cheat. It frustrates the whole purpose of redemption; it brings dishonour on the gospel of Christ; it puts a stumbling-block in the way of sinners, and is the greatest hindrance to the welfare of the Church. Preach often the necessity of holiness. Not one single word or action, not one moment of time, nor one region of the inner man is to be given up to sin, self, or the world. The Word of God, the Love of God, the Spirit of God must rule the whole man. As you proclaim that a full Christ, all that is in Him, His righteousness, His unsearchable riches, His unfathomable love, His presence, His Spirit, His glorious inheritance, all belong to the believing soul—so proclaim no less clearly that every power, gift, faculty—every member of the body, and every inch of territory in the human soul,—are to be wholly and unreservedly at the disposal of Christ. In the matter of holiness two special thoughts arise. In a very special manner "Holiness unto the Lord"

ought to be written over the porch of every clergyman's house. Who can tell the benefit to the Church when simplicity of life, sincerity of love, the spirit of self-sacrifice, are plainly manifest in the Vicarage or Parsonage? Who can tell the benefit when the sweet savour of love to Christ and His people, the sweet savour of prayer, praise, and intercession, is the atmosphere of a clergyman's family? And who can tell the injury to the cause of Christ when gaiety, the love of dress, luxurious entertainments, and the spirit of worldliness carry the day? Again, in the promotion of holiness, how exceedingly precious are those channels of blessing by which the Spirit of God sanctifies the believing soul. That feast of love where Christ by His Spirit manifests Himself to the soul of His true servant, that Word of life and peace whose promises reach to every need of our pilgrimage, that quiet retreat at the mercy-seat where the dew falls so richly on the parched ground, that fellowship of the saints where Christ is one in the midst—these must ever be declared to be as precious conduit-pipes by which the living waters fill the little cistern of the believer's heart,

(5.) *The Lord is at hand.* Advent reminds us that the day hastens apace when the King shall come, and every eye shall see Him. A few years ago I was at a little village in Sweden where the people

gathered together from all the surrounding country. In their best costume they came from hill and dale for miles around. Then there was a time of waiting. The evening shades began to prevail. Then, in the language of their country, there arose a cry, "The king is coming! the king is coming!" And so heartily and gladly they welcomed their good king Oscar. We must take up the same cry. We must tell our flocks that "the King is coming." True, evening shades may darken our world, days of trouble, distress, unsettlement, may overshadow our Church and our land; but this may be only a sign of His appearing. The King on the white horse will take the kingdom and reign for ever. Then will the true value of our ministry be known. What has been wood, hay, stubble; what has been gold, silver, and precious stones; what has been but the alloy and dross of human opinion; what has been His own revealed truth — all this that day shall plainly declare.

Before we leave the subject another question ought to engage our attention—not only "What shall I cry?" but "How shall I cry?" First, the cry must come from the depths of a sanctified, consecrated heart. What is the greatest of all causes for defection from the Church, coldness in the Church, a low standard of holiness, and a thousand other ills?

Why has the Church less power than in early ages? Why is so great a proportion of our population almost untouched? Is it not that there are those in the ministry who lack the power of a new life in the soul? Can we forget that there was one prophet who uttered most eloquent and glowing words, and who yet was the slave of covetousness, and perished amongst the enemies of Jehovah? Can we forget that amongst the chosen twelve, gathered by Christ Himself, one was a devil, and fell to his everlasting ruin? And may it not be so still? If you would have your cry to be mighty to reach the souls of men, above all things let there be reality. Let there be reality of repentance, of faith, of love, of thirsting after God, of hungering for the heavenly manna. Preach a crucified Saviour out of crucified hearts. Preach a risen Saviour, as risen with Him to a new and noble life. Preach an ascended Saviour, as having your affections set on things above. Preach a coming Saviour, as on the watch for His appearing. Drink ever deeper and deeper of the well of life as you bid others partake of its life-giving waters.

“How shall I cry?” Out of an ever-increasing store of treasured knowledge. Give quiet, thoughtful study to four books—the Word of God, the book of nature, the book of the human

heart, and the book of everyday life; and also such other books as may help you to the knowledge of these.

"How shall I cry?" Boldly, lovingly, hopefully, with reality and with sanctified common-sense. Boldly! Speak out manfully the deep convictions of your soul. Beware of man-pleasing. Beware of speaking smooth things. And for strength to do this, speak as in the presence of the Lord. "The presence of the Lord annihilates the largest congregation and gives importance to the smallest." Lovingly! Beware of all satire, sarcasm, and personality. Beware of anything that may give needless offence. "*Sauviter in modo; fortiter in re.*" Remember Henry Martyn, who never could speak of hell but with a tear in his eye. Hopefully! Believe that the message is from God, that He sends it, for it is His own Word. Then believe that He will bless it. Expect a blessing from each sermon you preach. Let it be spoken with reality. Be real to your own experience and to the lives of those around you. Be real to the events that are happening around you. Let there be sanctified common-sense. Consider your congregation, their circumstances and position, and let your words suit their needs.

"How shall I cry?" First to God and then to

man; for it is only in the mighty power of the Holy Ghost that the work can be done, and this must constantly be sought in earnest prayer. Remember the ten days in the upper chamber, and then in one single day three thousand souls were led to Christ. "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me unto the uttermost parts of the earth." Here is our only power—power for service, power for holiness, power for suffering. And it is in quiet solitary prayer we can best gain this power. I would speak to you in words not my own: "Solitude has been the nurse of the strongest spirits the Church has ever seen. In solitary prayer our Lord drew strength to meet every crisis of His life on earth. In this restless and busy age most of us live too much in public; we spend our spiritual strength and forget to renew it; we multiply our engagements, and curtail our prayers; we work when we ought to pray; we lose in calmness, in strength, in depth; we grow feeble, and shallow, and distracted. The ring has gone out of the messages, and the life has lost its power. The servant whom the Holy Ghost is to use must resist the tyranny of overwork."* Here is your strength. Be filled with the Spirit. Cry unto God for this.

* Address of the Rev. F. J. Chavasse, M.A., at the Reading Church Congress.

Wait upon God for this. Be content with nothing short of this. Then the old Pentecost days will return, and multitudes of souls be gathered unto the Church. At last you yourself shall hear the welcome words, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

THE END.

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